Humanitarianism and the "National Order of Things": Examining the Routinized Refugee Response in Eastern Cameroon

Angela Butel
Macalester College, abutel@macalester.edu

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Humanitarianism and the “National Order of Things”: Examining the Routinized Refugee Response in Eastern Cameroon

Angela Clare Butel
Macalester College
Honors Thesis in Anthropology

Advisor: Dianna Shandy, Anthropology

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Abstract

Despite growing academic interest in refugees and international humanitarian responses, the influx of refugees from the Central African Republic into eastern Cameroon, ongoing since 2005, has received little attention in scholarship or even in popular media. Though we know much about what can go wrong in large-scale, politicized refugee crises, less is known about how the refugee response works in more “everyday” refugee situations to effectively address the needs of refugees and their host communities. Drawing on ethnographic research conducted among humanitarian NGOs during a semester in Cameroon, I examine the implications for the host country of the routinized response to a relatively straightforward refugee crisis. I argue that the situation in eastern Cameroon contributes much to our understanding of how the international community can better assist refugees around the world.

My analysis of this response has yielded three key insights. First, a professionalized international refugee regime has responded using best practices built on experience, which suggests a cultural shift toward evidence-based approaches to humanitarian interventions. Second, integration of refugees into local communities has benefits that extend beyond the humanitarian space in which refugee services are administered. These benefits impact Cameroon’s processes of nation-building. Third, this nation-building reinforces Cameroon’s position as a state within the international community, fitting it more firmly into what scholar Liisa Malkki calls the “national order of things.”
Contents

Figure One: Map of Cameroon...................................................................................................................4

Chapter One: Introduction.........................................................................................................................5
  Theoretical and Methodological Considerations.....................................................................................7
  Conclusion..............................................................................................................................................21

Chapter Two: Migration, State Borders, and Being Out-of-Bounds.................................................23
  History of Cameroon................................................................................................................................23
  Conflict in the Central African Republic.................................................................................................33
  Development of the International Refugee Regime.................................................................................36
  Conclusion..............................................................................................................................................39

Chapter Three: Local Integration, Humanitarian Norms, and Keys to Cameroonian Success.................................................................................................................................41
  Making Local Integration Work in Eastern Cameroon........................................................................43
  Humanitarian Principles and Best Practices..........................................................................................50
  Conclusion..............................................................................................................................................65

Chapter Four: Humanitarianism, Development, and Cameroonian State-Building..............67
  Theoretical Understandings of Effects of International Aid.................................................................67
  International Aid and Resource Flows..................................................................................................69
  Impacts of the Refugee Regime beyond the Humanitarian Space.......................................................73
  Conclusion..............................................................................................................................................85

  Anthropology in the World of Evaluation and Policy Making.............................................................87
  Conclusion..............................................................................................................................................95

Chapter Six: Conclusions.......................................................................................................................96

References..............................................................................................................................................101
Figure One: Map of Cameroon

The humanitarian presence in this Cameroonian city is palpable. Bertoua, the administrative capital of the East region, boasts numerous signs directing passersby to various non-governmental organizations (NGOs); white trucks of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) are ubiquitous. Even Bertouans whose lives do not seem directly impacted by the presence of refugees from the Central African Republic (CAR) are aware of the humanitarian presence in their city. Interest in this presence drew me to Bertoua: what does an international response to a refugee influx mean for refugees, local host communities, and the nation? This is a particularly salient question as international media headlines focus on places like Darfur or Somalia but seem to overlook smaller, less geo-strategically significant, and, by my assessment, effective responses to refugee situations. The time I spent in Bertoua in April 2012, and my desire to investigate this question, became the starting points for this thesis.

In the pages that follow, I focus on the situation in eastern Cameroon to argue that this routinized refugee response has much to contribute to our understanding of how the international community can effectively address the needs of refugees around the world. (I use the term “routinized refugee response” or “routinized crisis” throughout this thesis to refer to situations such as that in eastern Cameroon which are the foil to “complex humanitarian emergencies.” Unlike in cases where population movements are in the hundreds of thousands and humanitarian actors must work in a context of ongoing insecurity, in routinized crises organizations can implement their programs according to
policies and routines formulated from experience and evidence). Analysis of the situation in eastern Cameroon yields three key insights. First, a professionalized international refugee regime\(^1\), using solutions and best practices built on experience, has handled the situation in a routinized way; this suggests a cultural shift toward evidence-based approaches to humanitarian interventions. Second, integration of refugees into local communities has benefits that extend far beyond the humanitarian space in which refugee services are administered and, in fact, has significant implications for processes of nation-building in Cameroon as a whole. And third, this nation-building reinforces Cameroon’s position as a state within the international community. That such insights arise from a little-researched crisis suggests an important opportunity for applied anthropology to shape humanitarian policy through evaluation of successful intervention models.

When I speak of success in this thesis—a concept that is central to my argument because I observe that the success of the humanitarian intervention is what has allowed for the broader development impacts on Cameroon—I am referring to success from the point of view of the humanitarian organizations with which I primarily worked in my research. For people at these organizations, success means that refugees’ and host communities’ basic needs are met—there are not significant problems of health, hunger, or homelessness—and communities are making observable progress toward autonomy and self-sufficiency. Though “success” could be understood as an abstract and highly subjective concept, the organizations with which I worked have attempted to devise

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\(^1\) The refugee regime has been defined by Charles Keely (2001:303) as “the collection of conventions, treaties, intergovernmental and non-governmental agencies, precedent, and funding which governments have adopted and support to protect and assist those displaced from their country by persecution, or displaced by war in some regions of the world where agreements or practice have extended protection to persons displaced by the general devastation of war, even if they are not specifically targeted for persecution.”
objective ways of measuring it. They set quantitative goals at the beginning of a project, such as improving the enrollment of girls in schools by five percent or that fifty percent of community members will make use of a well, and define success as meeting that goal. They also reported using more qualitative measures of success, such as surveying villagers on their satisfaction with humanitarian projects. In addition to forming my understanding of what constitutes success throughout this thesis, the importance my informants placed on measuring success contributes to my argument about shifts toward evidence-based procedures in humanitarian interventions.

**Theoretical and Methodological Considerations**

*Refugees and the National Order of Things*

I argue, then, that the routinized response used in the East promotes Cameroon’s development and international status. This observation challenges humanitarian scholars (Fassin 2011; Fassin and Pandolfi 2010; Keely 2001; Loescher 2001) who argue that the development of international humanitarianism erodes systems based on the ideal of national sovereignty. In exploring this challenge, I turn to Liisa Malkki:

One of the most illuminating ways of getting at the categorical quality of the national order of things is to examine what happens when this order is challenged or subverted. Refugees can represent precisely such a subversion. They are an “abomination” (Douglas 1966) produced and made meaningful by the categorical order itself, even as they are excluded from it. [Malkki 1995:6]

We tend to take Malkki’s “national order of things” as a given; the world is divided into discrete nation-states that relate to each other in certain accepted ways. The presence of refugees calls this national order of things into question. Refugees exist in a liminal space
between states; they are an “abomination,” belonging neither in one place nor the other. Malkki argues that by existing in the gaps in the national order, refugees reveal its mythical nature. I take this argument a step further, regarding the international refugee regime as a macro-level response aimed at cleansing society of the “pollution” of refugees. Refugees highlight the cracks in the categorical order of nation-states but also provide a sanctioned avenue for reinforcing the normativity of that order. As it pursues its three “durable solutions”—repatriation, local settlement, and third-country resettlement—the refugee regime reinforces the nation-state ideal by affirming that every person should belong to a recognized state. This idea is reminiscent of Max Gluckman’s writing on “rites of reversal”—instances in which the normal order is reversed are precisely those situations through which that order is preserved and reinforced (Gluckman 1967).

My research in Cameroon highlights another facet of this reinforcing role of the international refugee regime. The international NGOs that facilitate the integration of refugees in eastern Cameroon contribute significantly to Cameroon’s development. Through creation of infrastructure and provision of material resources, building of human capital, and consultation around international norms, humanitarian NGOs contribute at least as much to Cameroon as a state as they do to refugees from the CAR. This problematizes the divide between humanitarian and development activities. If humanitarian aid is to contribute to development processes, we must consider Ferguson’s (1990) assertion that development projects can strengthen a state’s power at the periphery of its territory. This suggestion provides a useful framework for understanding how humanitarian contributions to Cameroon’s development fortify its claim to being a
sovereign nation-state in the eyes of the international community. By more solidly bringing the marginal East region into the national fold, the refugee regime does not erode national sovereignty so much as it reinforces Cameroon’s international legitimacy.

This thesis builds on work by numerous other scholars who have made refugees, and international humanitarianism, their focus of study. In anthropology, as in other disciplines, scholarship on refugees has become an important subfield, with many scholars studying refugee populations in concentrated areas such as refugee camps or, increasingly, in multi-sited ethnographies of the diaspora (Ong 2003; Shandy 2007). These scholars have shaped the idea of “refugee” into a knowable subject for research (Malkki 1995a). My own understanding of the need to study the refugee situation in Cameroon thus builds on the foundation laid by these scholars.

Some of the earliest scholars of refugees in African contexts, such as Gould (1974), Hansen (1981), and Nobel (1982), write about refugees in broad terms. They grapple with what makes an “African refugee” different from refugees in other regions, with definitions and categorizations, and with problems with arbitrary African borders (Pitterman 1984; Zetter 1988; Zolberg et al. 1989). They raise important issues that continue to influence refugee studies: the questionable accuracy of statistics in African crises, the legacies of historic migratory patterns, the fact that refugees are not powerless victims without agency, and discrepancies in access to services between urban and rural refugees. However, the generalized approach of these scholars has become less common.

Instead, as more scholars began to study refugees, topics of research became increasingly specialized. A good example of this is Liisa Malkki’s work. Malkki spent a
year in rural western Tanzania with Hutu refugees who had fled Burundi in 1972. Drawing on field research among refugees settled in both local towns and refugee camps, Malkki constructs a comparative analysis of the groups’ understandings of identity, history, homeland, and exile (Malkki 1995a:2). The result is an “ethnography of displacement,” as Malkki terms it:

It is not an ethnography of any eternal place or “its people,” nor is its aim to give a comprehensive account of the social life of “a community.” Instead...it is concerned to explore how displacement and deterritorialization-conditions which are “normal” for increasingly large numbers of people today-may shape the social construction of “nationness” and history, identity and enmity. [Malkki 1995a:1]

Malkki’s ethnography represents a transformed understanding both of refugees and of ethnography itself. From an early anthropological view of ethnography as a tool for cataloguing static and timeless societies, Malkki reinterprets it to document social change and physical movement. Malkki is less concerned with categorizing migrants, instead content to study the lived daily realities of the “increasingly large numbers of people” for whom displacement is experienced as normal (Malkki 1995a:1). These shifts illustrate well the process within anthropology of constructing refugees as a domain of study.

Any study relating to refugees, then, must recognize that “refugee” is a constructed category of understanding, shaped by academic perspectives but also by definitions in international law that have developed out of particular historical contexts (taken up in more detail in Chapter Two) and by perceptions in popular discourse. As Zolberg et al. argue, however, simply because the refugee label is a human construct does not erase the significance it holds in the lives of those to whom it is applied:
Refugee has become a category on whose basis international organizations and individual states engage in a process of worldwide triage. Refugee status is a privilege or entitlement, giving those who qualify access to certain scarce resources or services outside their own country, such as admission into another country ahead of a long line of claimants, legal protection abroad, and often some material assistance from private or public agencies. [1989:3]

A study that, as mine does, examines the benefits that result from a refugee response must understand the history and development of “refugee” as a category. Such an understanding also yields insight into the differential application of the concept around the world; it illuminates how the refugee label may be expanded to encompass increasing numbers of people in the global South (internally displaced persons, “environmental refugees,” those displaced by conflict), while simultaneously shrinking to exclude certain kinds of people from access to the global North (Fassin 2011; Keely 2001; Zetter 2007).

The process of constructing refugees as a domain of knowledge has continued as scholars study refugees from a variety of theoretical perspectives and in relation to an ever-increasing number of other social phenomena: racism, xenophobia, immigration policies, state practices of violence and war, human rights, state sovereignty, development, diaspora, and memory, among others (Malkki 1995b). Much scholarship examines refugees in relation to decolonization, documenting the global shift to regarding refugees primarily as a third-world problem (Harrell-Bond 1986; Hein 1993; Malkki 1995b:503). Scholars have studied refugees from the macro-level perspective of international relations and security, regarding population displacement and control as crucial factors in foreign policy (Loescher 1992, 2001; Malkki 1995b:504). An interdisciplinary “refugee studies” approach provides a more micro-level perspective based on case studies of specific situations (Malkki 1995b:507; Stein 1981; Zetter 1988).
Probably the largest domain of research links refugees to the development discourse, investigating the impacts of refugees and refugee assistance on processes of development (Hansen and Oliver-Smith 1982; Harrell-Bond 1986; Hein 1993; Jacobsen 2002; Malkki 1995b:506). Humanitarianism and development are understood as separate processes, with differing senses of temporality: humanitarianism is a short-term response to an emergency while development involves longer-term changes to societal processes and structures. However, practitioners increasingly recognize the importance of negotiating the transition between humanitarianism and development, suggesting a change from past assertions of a firmer division. Much of the activity in Cameroon at the time of my field research fell into a grey area between humanitarianism and development; my analysis thus places me within the tradition of scholars examining the arbitrary divide between the two spheres as well as their mutual impacts.

In addition to the many perspectives on refugees themselves, a body of scholarship examines the international networks and organizations that respond to refugee crises. Three main categories emerge within this literature. The first includes documentation of the emergence of an international refugee regime, including the development of the UNHCR and other intergovernmental and international organizations (Bass 2008; Betts 2009; Loescher 2001; Minear 2002). These works highlight the inherently political nature of international humanitarian work, challenging the popular conception of such work as wholly altruistic. In fact, these scholars argue, the refugee regime is bound up in other systems of global governance and plays a role in negotiations
around states, borders, and power (see Chapter Two). A recognition of the political undertones of humanitarianism guides my writing.

A second perspective on the refugee regime is highly critical. This perspective builds on the work of Barbara Harrell-Bond, one of the first scholars to critically examine the impacts of international aid on refugees and their host communities (1987). More recent examples include the works found in Fassin and Pandolfi’s 2010 anthology. This volume turns a critical eye on many facets of international humanitarianism, including the construction of an emergency (Calhoun 2010; Ophir 2010), the growing militarization of humanitarian interventions (Orford 2010; Vasquez Lezama 2010), the paradoxical existence of “permanent states of emergency” (Pandolfi 2010), a growing international acceptance of the right or even responsibility to intervene in emergencies (Chikuhwa 2012; Makaremi 2010), and the substitution of humanitarian action for more overt politics (Fassin 2010, MacFalls 2010). Many of these scholars question the very motives behind humanitarian interventions.

These critical scholars point out that the outside political interests associated with a crisis can render humanitarian efforts ineffective or even harmful. The importance of such studies is undeniable; where our model for humanitarian aid has failed, we must understand why in order to solve the problems. As the field of humanitarianism has developed, “there is far greater readiness to canvass criticism and acknowledge difficulty. Nobility of purpose no longer confers immunity from sociological critique” (de Waal 2005:viii). Such critique should apply even where the model has not visibly failed. Sociological critique that does not uncover abuses or mistakes can still uncover important
societal dynamics that add to our overall understanding of the current state of humanitarian affairs. Studies of humanitarian approaches, both failures and successes, are important for creating better models that avoid the well-documented mistakes of the past.

A third approach to studying humanitarian responses includes elements of this critical perspective but focuses on a more operational-level understanding of the work of humanitarian organizations. This perspective is well-represented by the work of Fiona Terry (2002), who writes about her experiences working with Médecins sans Frontières (MSF) in Rwandan refugee camps in Zaire in the mid-1990s. Terry acknowledges that problems like militarization of refugee camps contributed to ongoing violence (Terry 2002:7). However, she also presents an experience-based argument for efforts to improve “humanitarian action in a second-best world” (Terry 2002:216). Mary Anderson (1999), similarly, argues that the dangers associated with humanitarian action are not justification for dismantling the whole system. While action sometimes has problematic outcomes, the choice not to act has consequences of its own. These scholars suggest that, while humanitarian action may never be free from inherent risks, outcomes can be consistently improved to more effectively and ethically assist people in need.

My thesis builds on these ideas about humanitarianism’s potential to be an imperfect solution for an imperfect world, even as it draws on other scholars’ assertions about the political effects of the refugee regime. Though I speak to what is working in the intervention in Cameroon, I do not mean to suggest that nothing problematic is occurring. For example, as I will discuss in Chapter Four, many of my informants were concerned about widespread corruption. Understanding where problems arise is unquestionably
crucial to finding solutions; I argue, however, that too often we adopt a solely problem-centric approach. In this thesis I choose to also examine how analysis of instances of success can strengthen the solutions we create. In this choice I build on the work of scholars such as Neil Thin (2012), who affirm that researching what is working can help inform policy decisions. The literature lacks a perspective on a routinized response such as that in eastern Cameroon. Very little has been written on refugees in Cameroon in general, and virtually nothing has been published on the most recent influx of Central African refugees into the East region; my work thus builds on the tradition of the scholars cited above while laying a foundation for addressing this gap in the literature.

**Ethnography among humanitarian NGOs**

The field research for this thesis formed part of my Spring 2012 semester abroad with a School for International Training (SIT) program titled Social Pluralism and Development. The final portion of the program was a month-long Independent Study, which I chose to spend in Bertoua, investigating the response to Central African refugees in the region. During my time in Bertoua, I lived with a local family, immersed myself in their daily life, and interviewed individuals involved in working with refugees.

My interest in this refugee situation was sparked by an earlier class project in which I discovered a dearth of scholarly, journalistic, or even practitioner investigation of the situation. Despite the presence of more than 100,000 refugees of various nationalities, Cameroonian refugee situations were deemed “silent” and “forgotten” crises in NGO press releases (MSF 2007; UNHCR 2007a; UNHCR 2007b; UNHCR 2010). As a study
abroad student, I brought with me some lingering questions: how are refugee crises being handled in Cameroon? And why has the crisis in the East received so little attention?

During my month researching humanitarian organizations in Bertoua, I answered some of these questions. I learned about the basic realities of the refugee response network—which actors are present, what roles they play, and how they interact. However, new questions arose around the lack of attention given to the situation in Cameroon. When does a refugee crisis receive intensive international attention, scrutiny, and funding, and when does it instead become an “everyday” problem for a professionalized regime? Why, if international attention translates into more money for aid, would Cameroon avoid creating highly visible refugee camps and instead integrate refugees into local communities? How do all of these questions tie into the political realities of a post-Cold War, post-colonial world based around a nation-state system linked to an international community? Through subsequent library research and theoretical framing I was able to respond to some of these questions, and my findings inform the argument for this thesis. Other questions will require further research and analysis to answer fully.

The East is an important part of Cameroon for the study of refugee issues due to the refugee influx which has continued in varying degrees of intensity since 2005. These refugees, fleeing ethnic persecution that manifests in “banditry” and kidnapping in the CAR, have mostly settled in eastern Cameroonian communities, though some have moved north into the Adamaoua region, and some have migrated to major cities such as Yaoundé. The population increase from those refugees who do remain in the East adds strain on the infrastructure of a region with the reputation as one of the least developed in
Cameroon. To assist both refugees and local communities, a flourishing NGO community has sprung up in the East, coordinated by major intergovernmental organizations such as the UNHCR. My research focused on the approaches and attitudes of these organizations, rather than on the perspectives of refugees themselves.

As I investigated this NGO community, my principal method of field study was based on the Spradley-McCurdy method of ethnographic interviewing. I conducted a total of twenty interviews with individuals related in some capacity to the refugee response in the East. Most of these interviews were with employees of two different NGOs: Plan Cameroon (Plan), an international NGO focused primarily on community development, and Première Urgence - Aide Médicale Internationale (PU-AMI), a French NGO working specifically in refugee crises. I interviewed the directors of both organizations’ field offices in Bertoua several times to gain a sense of the structure and activities of each organization and how their foundational principles and philosophies shape their approach to working with refugee communities in the East. I also interviewed four to five other individuals at each organization to include a wider range of voices and perspectives.2 In total, my interviews at the NGOs allowed me to compare two approaches to working with refugee and host communities and to understanding refugee emergencies as distinct from or tied to local processes of development.

To round out my understanding of the refugee response, I interviewed a representative of the UNHCR in Bertoua about the overall infrastructure of organizations

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2 A list of my interviews, with brief descriptions of my informants and their roles in the organizations, can be found at the end of my bibliography. When I quote my informants in the body of this text, I leave the quotes in the original language to preserve the authentic voice of my informants; translations for French quotes are provided in footnotes.
in the region. I also interviewed representatives from the Ministry of External Relations, the Ministry of National Security, and the Ministry of Basic Education to understand the viewpoint of the Cameroonian government on the situation of refugees in the country.

I recognize that, because my informants were predominantly people whose job it is to ensure the success of the refugee intervention in eastern Cameroon, I obtained what might appear to be a naively positive perspective on the situation. People who choose to work in this field might be naturally more optimistic, more likely to understand their work as a noble calling and to overlook problems that might exist (although, as I will discuss in Chapter Four, many of them also fall into this profession by chance or because it is the work that is available). Also, my informants, in striving to maintain the reputation of their organization or to remain on good terms with the government, might have been hesitant to share information about problems. I acknowledge that these factors may have influenced the perspective I present in this thesis. However, I also believe that an analysis of the successful elements I was able to document is valuable in that it yielded the insights on which I base my argument for this thesis.

Language was an important consideration in conducting my interviews. French and English are both official languages in Cameroon; French, however, is predominant, with English spoken mainly in only two of Cameroon’s ten regions. As I am proficient in French, language was not a barrier for my research. Before beginning an interview, I asked my informant which language he or she preferred, and proceeded in that language. Though most of my interviews were conducted in French, I conducted interviews in English with a few Anglophone informants.
I obtained verbal or written informed consent from informants, depending on what they felt comfortable giving. Most of my informants granted permission to record interview, which I transcribed and coded to draw out themes. In my transcripts, as I do throughout this paper, I used pseudonyms to protect the anonymity of my informants. All interviews, transcripts, codes, and other information for the project were saved either on my personal computer or personal USB drive and I was careful not to leave any information open to others, again with a goal of protecting informants’ privacy.

In addition to interviews, I engaged in participant observation. Generally, participating in day-to-day life with my host family and friends I made in the city gave me a sense of the context in which the work of these organizations takes place. More specifically, I spent significant time in the NGOs’ offices and was able to observe the flow of everyday activity. While waiting for interviews, for example, I had the chance to sit in the organizations’ lobbies and watch people going about their work. Twice I was invited to dinner by several of my informants, French expatriates working for PU-AMI. These occasions gave me a chance to observe in a different context than that of the daily work environment. These dinners also provided insight into the humanitarian community in Bertoua and its social as well as professional elements.

My research was also shaped by written sources. I reviewed various organizations’ promotional literature, such as brochures and pamphlets, which spoke to how these organizations present themselves to outsiders. The organizations’ websites provided additional information on their operational budgets and evaluations of projects. I consulted local media sources as well, which yielded local perspectives on changes in
Cameroon’s refugee law. I further supplemented my interview and observation data with library research on topics relating to Cameroon, the history of African refugee situations, and critical evaluations of humanitarian work, grounding my thesis in current theory and situating my own field research in its broader context.

Research for other projects has informed my analysis for this thesis. Since my sophomore year of college, when I decided I would study abroad in Cameroon, I have focused on the country for most of my research projects. I have investigated subjects ranging from political decentralization to the status of indigenous peoples in Cameroon to gender inequalities in education. Though not directly related to the refugee response, the research for these projects has deepened my grounding in the overall context of Cameroon. In Fall 2012 I also completed an internship with Opportunity Africa, a small non-profit organization based in Minnesota that provides scholarships to high school students in eastern Cameroon. My work with this organization deepened my understanding of the workings of the NGO community in the East.

Though I strove to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the situation in eastern Cameroon, I did encounter some limitations. One major hurdle involved gaining access to humanitarian organizations. Large international NGOs can be very bureaucratic; to conduct interviews, I needed permission from the proper authority, which often proved difficult to obtain. Once in the field, I had to adjust my plans and work with organizations that granted me access, which were not necessarily the organizations I originally had in mind. In the end, I found organizations that fit well with my original intentions for the
study, but I might have been able to gain more insider information from, for example, the UNHCR if I had been able to obtain official authorization.

Another related limitation, also stemming from the bureaucratic nature of organizations, was that some of my informants were wary about having their identities linked to any information they might provide me and were thus unwilling to have our conversations recorded. This was especially true in my interviews with government officials and with the UNHCR representative. I compensated by taking copious notes during these interviews and reconstructing as complete a transcription as I could immediately following each interview. Although this was a challenge in some ways, it is also a strength that, by remaining flexible, I was able to interview people who were somewhat reluctant to talk about their involvement in the refugee response.

Two final, related limitations involved my own time constraints and the busy lives of my informants. Four weeks is a very brief period to get to a research site, establish contact with informants, conduct interviews, analyze and organize data, and produce a report. Because my informants were often called unexpectedly into the field to deal with sudden developments, it was often a challenge to complete what I hoped to do. I was left with some remaining questions by the end of my month in Bertoua but tried to seek out the most detailed and rich information I could given the constraints on both sides.

**Conclusion**

Through my experiences in Cameroon and my investigation of other scholarly perspectives on the subject, I have developed the argument that the routinized refugee
response in eastern Cameroon, through successfully facilitated local integration, holds benefits for Cameroon’s process of nation-building. Chapter One has introduced my argument and outlined my theoretical framework and research methods. Chapter Two provides a regional history with an emphasis on long-established patterns of migration, exploring the interplay of these patterns with the “refugee” concept and with international regulations of movement. This chapter asserts that exploration of the local implications of international systems must be historically and geographically rooted in the local context.

Chapter Three examines the approach to refugee integration in eastern Cameroon, outlining the merits of a local integration model as opposed to refugee camps and the best practices that guide NGOs’ actions. This chapter argues that the professionalization of the refugee regime has allowed a routinization of responses in cases such as Cameroon. Chapter Four builds on this discussion to illustrate how the routinized nature of the response in Cameroon creates opportunities for nation-building for the Cameroonian state. This chapter, in highlighting the development impacts of humanitarian aid in eastern Cameroon, supports the argument that local integration of refugees interfaces with development processes to elevate Cameroon’s status in the order of nation-states.

Chapter Five examines the broader context of a shift toward an evaluation-based approach within the refugee regime. I reiterate my argument for the merits of studying cases of success and suggest some implications of this approach for anthropological contributions to policy-making. Finally, Chapter Six summarizes my argument and the evidence used to support it, and raises some important avenues for future research.
Chapter Two
Migration, State Borders, and Being Out-of-Bounds

The categorical order of nation-states has become normative: “The world is organized as a set of mutually exclusive states...on which individuals normally depend for protection against violence, and for the maintenance of conditions that enable them to survive materially” (Zolberg et al 1989:33). The loss of that state protection creates an entry point for the refugee regime to work toward getting things back to “normal.” The state system has not always existed in its current form and remains fluid, as South Sudan’s 2011 independence illustrates. It is, however, the structure framing the processes I describe in this thesis. In this chapter I provide historical and political background on the states involved in the refugee crisis in eastern Cameroon and on the refugee regime that works in the liminal spaces between those states. Though many of the processes involved in these interactions originate at a macro level, a grounding in local histories and realities is crucial to understanding the impacts on the micro level. As I situate this thesis in its Cameroonian context, I underline how the constructed nature of the national order of things helps explain the political maneuvering that happens within it and the perceived need to hold it together in the face of threats such as that posed by refugees.

History of Cameroon
Unity in diversity, stability in centralization

Cameroon is often called “Africa in Miniature,” reflecting its diversity of landscapes (ranging from near-desert in the North to rainforest in the South) and peoples
(estimates of the number of ethnic groups range as high as 250). This name also reflects the multiplicity of historical influences that have shaped Cameroon’s journey toward its current social and political situation. Cameroon’s layers of diversity testify to the fact that it has not always existed as a state in its current form and that its present political realities include tensions stemming from the divergent backgrounds and needs of its people.

Though its emergence as a state in the modern sense came later, organized political entities have long existed in the region that is now Cameroon. The earliest traceable civilization in the region is the Sao, believed to have existed from the fifth to the eighth or ninth centuries C.E. (Fanso 1989:18). After the Sao, the Kanem Empire expanded to encompass most of present-day Chad, Cameroon, Nigeria, and Niger, extending east to the Middle Nile (Fanso 1989:20). Islam came to Cameroon under the Kanem Empire, and continues to hold great sway in the northern regions of Cameroon through the dominance of Lamidos, regional spiritual and political leaders. The Duala ethnic group developed a chamber of commerce to protect their economic interests against competition from German merchants before the arrival of colonialism (Gros 2003:3). European exploration began in the 15th century with the Portuguese, who inspired Cameroon’s name by dubbing one of its rivers *Rio dos Camaroes*, River of Prawns (Gros 2003:1). The Trans-Atlantic slave trade, which began in the 16th century, also impacted Cameroon: some estimate that at least two and a half million people left Cameroon in the control of European slave traders (Fanso 1985:73; Gros 2003:1).

Although Cameroon is often described as having been colonized by the Germans and later by the British and French, in strict legal terms Cameroon was never a colony. As
the colonial period in Africa came into full swing, Cameroon became the German protectorate of Kamerun in 1884 with a treaty between the German envoy and two Cameroonians kings (Gros 2003:2). German rule was characterized by low levels of development and gradual expansion of power, mainly spurred by Christian missionaries (Gros 2003:2). Although Kamerun was not legally a colony, one could observe “all the visible imprints of early colonial rule: forced labor, dependence on a limited number of cash crops grown on large plantations, expropriation of African land, single-track railroads running from production centers in the interior to export points on the coast...etc.” (Gros 2003:2). The East, far from the coast and circumvented by these minimal colonial railroad systems, remained a marginal region, and to this day maintains a reputation as one of the least developed regions of Cameroon.

With the outbreak of World War I, Germany lost its colonies and Kamerun became The Cameroons, a League of Nations mandate split between Britain and France. Britain and France invested significantly in the domain of industrial agriculture, making Cameroon dependent on export of cash crops (Gros 2003:5). These developments did affect the East, where the main modes of livelihood are cultivation of cash crops and commercial exploitation of timber (Neba 1987). Another problematic colonial legacy stems from the harsh repression of opposition to European rule (Gros 2003:7). Such suppression of nationalist tendencies has continued to the present, as “inflexibility, prevarication, obstruction, secrecy and violence have been the typical responses of Cameroon’s elite to popular demand for greater democracy, transparency, equitable wealth distribution and independence” (Gros 2003:7).
This sort of political repression is often considered typical of the administration of Ahmadou Ahidjo, Cameroon’s first president upon independence. (Independence came in 1960 for French Cameroun and 1961 for the British Cameroons, which then united with the formerly French regions to form a federal republic. Ahidjo abolished the federation in 1972, creating a centralized republic). Although Ahidjo consolidated the diverse and historically differentiated regions of Cameroon, his authoritarian regime gained a reputation for human rights violations (Gros 2003:11). Ahidjo was replaced in 1982 by his successor, Paul Biya, widely thought to have been groomed as his replacement. Biya remains the president as of this writing. Although there was political liberalization under Biya beginning in the 1990s, with increased freedom of the press and institution of a multiparty system, many Cameroonians remain frustrated with the ongoing corruption and patron-clientism of the government (Fonchingong 2004; Nyamnjoh 1999).

In 2008, Biya changed the constitution to remove term limits and allow himself to remain in power (Sa’ah 2012). He subsequently went on to win the 2011 presidential election with 78 percent of the vote, and in 2012 celebrated his thirtieth year in power (Sa’ah 2012). This places him among Africa’s longest-reigning leaders, second only to Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo of Equatorial Guinea, Jose Eduardo dos Santos of Angola, and Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe (Sa’ah 2012). Though Biya has maintained his position through supposedly legal democratic elections, there have been questions about corruption since the 1992 election, which many believe was in truth won by opposition candidate John Fru Ndi. Reformers have little recourse when, despite supposed progress in rights to free speech, citizens can still be arrested and imprisoned for comments made
in their personal lives (UN News Service 2012). Cameroonians are frustrated by this atmosphere and by promises of change made but not kept. However, until now the strong, centralized government has kept these tensions in check; this government, though repressive to its citizens in many ways, has also guaranteed the stable environment that enables the successful refugee response.

*Legacies of fluidity and mobility*

Though Cameroon has, in the years since independence, worked toward conforming to an international ideal of statehood within the borders defined at the Berlin Conference in 1885, the region that is now Cameroon has a long history of migration and intermingling of peoples. Recent flows of refugees from the CAR to Cameroon are not an anomaly; they are tied to political and migratory legacies of the region. Early population displacements in the region can be traced to the Bantu migrations, which began around 1000 B.C.E. (Fanso 1989:10). These migrations involved movements of Bantu-speaking peoples from a place of origin in northwest Africa to their current locations across the continent. Although facts on such ancient migrations are difficult to pinpoint, several leading scholars have identified an area encompassing parts of contemporary Cameroon and Nigeria as the starting place for the Bantu migrations (Fanso 1989:10). From prehistoric times, then, Cameroon has been a major locus of migration.

Migration patterns did not involve only migration outward from Cameroon to other parts of Africa; there was much migration internal to the region as well. Prior to and during the nineteenth century, there was significant southward migration in Cameroon,
with groups such as the Tikar, the Nso, the Bamum, the Kom, the Fang, and the Bafut moving south and establishing new settlements (Ngoh 1996:1). Southward movement stemmed also from raids by nomadic pastoral groups from the north, including the Chamba and the Fulani (Ngoh 1996:1). There was also eastward migration of the Bayang people (Ngoh 1996:2). These migrations happened for a variety of reasons, from competition for land and resources to campaigns to spread Islam southward to, eventually, arrival of Europeans and the slave trade (Ngoh 1996).

One significant migratory trend during Cameroon’s precolonial history which has bearing for this thesis is the “international” nature of population movements. Ekoi peoples migrated from what is now Nigeria into what is now Cameroon, and Tikar peoples migrated in the opposite direction (Ngoh 1996:2). The nomadic Fulani ranged between northern Nigeria, Cameroon, and other parts of equatorial Africa (Ngoh 1996:2). There were migratory ties between Cameroon and eastern Sudan (Ngoh 1996:2). And, most significantly for this thesis, there were ongoing migrations of Gbaya peoples between what is now Cameroon and what is now the Central African Republic (Ngoh 1996:2). It was only with the imposition of the current national borders in 1885 that these population movements became international migrations subject to regulations associated with the crossing of borders. Before that formalization of territories, such migrations were a normal, integral part of the political and economic landscape of the region.

The history and current situation of Cameroon’s nomadic peoples has been extensively studied, especially as it relates to ideas of national belonging and nation-building (Ceuppens and Geschiere 2005; Davis 1995; Mouiche 2011; Nyamnjoh and
Rowlands 1998; Pelican 2008; Pelican 2009). The way these histories tie into local discourses about autochthony and belonging, and to international discourses on indigeneity and national identity, are highly relevant to any discussion of migration and refugee status. In Cameroon in particular, these questions are particularly interesting in that refugees arriving from the CAR are from historically nomadic ethnic groups and are joining ethnically similar communities on the other side of a national border. Though I touch on these themes several times throughout this thesis, because of the constraints of my project I was unable to seek out community-level perspectives on refugees’ impacts on local ideas about belonging; thus, when I refer to nation-building, I am regarding it from a government-policy perspective rather than one of local discourses of belonging.

At the conclusion of World War II and through independence processes across Africa, migration became more regulated. The legal category of “refugee” was coming into common use in international law and institutional frameworks for identifying and assisting refugees were developing. Population movements continued, but now crossing a border for certain reasons could move one legally into the category of “refugee.” A “refugee” was defined in the 1950 UNHCR Statute and the 1951 UN Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees as “any person who is outside their country of origin and unable or unwilling to return there or to avail themselves of its protection, on account of a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular group, or political opinion.” This definition was originally restricted to people fleeing persecution owing to events occurring before 1951 (Goodwin-Gill 2008:3). Later, the 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees widened the
definition to include later refugee-producing situations. Other refugee definitions, such as that of the Organization of African Unity (OAU), expanded the definition of “refugee” even further; the OAU definition includes those displaced by “external aggression, occupation, foreign domination or events seriously disturbing public order” in addition to persecution (OAU 1969:5). All of these foundational documents contributed to the construction of a legal category of “refugee” by the international community.

Even as the refugee concept gained traction internationally, and though Cameroon is a signatory to the 1951 UN Convention as well as the 1969 OAU Convention, it took some time for Cameroon to incorporate the legal category of “refugee” into its domestic law. Law Number 1990/043 of 1990, which defined the conditions of admissibility, residence, and leave of foreigners in Cameroon, does not mention refugees at all. It does, however, assert the inviolability of Cameroon’s borders and emphasize the necessity of proper documentation for any movements into and out of Cameroon, contrasting with the fluid mobility that existed before the institution of national borders. A later law, Law Number 1997/012 of 1997, does mention refugees but states only that a refugee card will be delivered to people who qualify for asylum. It was not until the passage of the 2005 Law on the Status of Refugees in Cameroon that refugees as a category received extensive attention in Cameroonian law (Loi numero 2005/006).

The 2005 law uses the expanded refugee definition of the OAU to include those who flee due to violence as well as persecution. The law also enumerates grants rights such as non-discrimination, free practice of religion, ownership of property, education, lodging, and movement to refugees as long as they respect Cameroon’s laws. Finally, the
law envisions the establishment of two commissions, one to decide on the eligibility of applicants for refugee status and another to process appeals. These commissions would replace the UNHCR in conducting refugee status determinations and in providing refugees with identification documentation. However, the 2005 law did not launch the actual creation of these commissions, and since its passage the UNHCR has continued in its role of determining refugee status.

Finally, though, in November of 2011, a decree of application for the 2005 law was signed which outlined the process for establishing the commissions. From the signing of the decree, the government was given six months to make the commissions operational. At the time of my research, four months later, progress had been made but the commissions were not yet active. The government representative responsible for refugee issues explained to me that “En ce moment on a toutes les commissions qui sont déjà pourvues, les administrations représentées dans ces commissions ont déjà désigné leurs membres. Une fois qu’on aura constaté la composition des deux commissions, on va prêter serment auprès du tribunal de grand instance de Yaoundé. Et après, on va pouvoir travailler”³ (Charles, interview 04/02/12). He was optimistic about the six-month deadline. Outside observers, such as my informant from the UNHCR, were more skeptical: “On se rend compte que le temps est en train de passer, et pour tout accomplir en 6 mois, ça va être un peu difficile. Donc le HCR continue avec ses activités, et on espère que, progressivement, les commissions vont commencer a travailler comme c’est

³ “Right now we have both commissions already provided for, the administrations represented on these commissions have already designated their members. Once we’ve verified the composition of the two commissions, we will testify before the supreme court in Yaoundé. After that, we will be able to work.”
prévu dans la loi.”\textsuperscript{4} (Isaac, interview 04/16/12). This will be a development to continue monitoring as Cameroon claims more autonomy in determining refugee status.

The influx of Central African refugees which forms the basis for this thesis is certainly not the first instance of forced migration into Cameroon in recent history. Armed conflict in neighboring Chad in 1979, for example, prompted an outflow of between 200,000 and 300,000 refugees, most of whom fled to Cameroon (Nobel 1982:277). Refugee influxes from Chad have been an ongoing occurrence in Cameroon, with an additional 40,000 refugees arriving in 1990 and 58,000 more fleeing violence between government troops and rebel forces in 2008 (Rene 2009:5). Conflict in Nigeria in 2001 spurred an influx of about 17,000 refugees into Cameroon (Rene 2009:6). Even in the absence of a domestic refugee law, Cameroon followed its obligations under international law by providing temporary asylum and promoting voluntary repatriation, in keeping with broader trends in the region (Nobel 1982:267). Today, according to UNHCR statistics, Cameroon hosts not only Central African refugees but also refugees from Chad, Nigeria, Rwanda, and various other countries. Cameroon’s reputation as a politically stable and hospitable country, its central location and shared borders with several neighboring states, its bilingualism, and cross-border ethnic ties between groups all make Cameroon a popular destination for those seeking refuge.

The question of cross-border ethnic ties is interesting in relation to the Mbororo refugees from the CAR. The Mbororo, a historically nomadic pastoral people, inhabit both Cameroon and the Central African Republic. The institution of national borders

\textsuperscript{4} “We realize that time is passing and to accomplish everything in six months might be a little bit difficult. So the HCR continues with its activities, and we hope that, progressively, the commissions will begin to work as foreseen in the law.”
modified Mbororo traditional patterns of migration by creating boundaries which theoretically require additional legal permission to cross. However, as recently as 2007 the African Union convened a fact-finding mission to investigate the “problem” of Mbororo migration in the Democratic Republic of Congo, CAR, the Sudans, and Cameroon (African Union 2008). This mission determined that “in all seasons and socio-political events, groups move with their livestock from one country to another” (African Union 2008:6-7). Migration has continued into recent times as a reality for many Mbororo, but the current refugee situation is transforming that reality. Fear of insecurity sparked by the refugee influx “has led the Government of Cameroon to create a special unit to secure the border with CAR” (African Union 2008:7). The refugee influx is leading Cameroon to re-imagine its relationship to migration as it strengthens its control at the borders of its territory.

**Conflict in the Central African Republic**

The borders currently in place in Africa may be recent human constructions, but they still hold power in shaping relationships between individuals and states. To understand the implications of the international response to Central African refugees in Cameroon, then, it is not enough to examine what is happening on the Cameroonian side of the border. The events precipitating Central Africans’ flight are also part of the story.

The ongoing (as of this writing) conflict in the CAR began in 2001 following an unsuccessful coup attempt by former president Kolingba against then-president Ange-Félix Patassé (MRGI 2008). Following the coup attempt, Army Chief of Staff François
Bozizé, a Kolingba supporter, fled to Chad along with part of the army, where he regrouped and waited for a chance to try again (MRGI 2008). Bozizé launched subsequent coup attempts in 2002 and 2003, taking possession of several northern towns; the Patassé government sought assistance from the Mouvement pour la Libération du Congo (MLC) in repelling these attacks (MRGI 2008). The government and MLC forces have allegedly committed war crimes in attempts to recapture northern towns; thus, people in these towns have suffered at the hands of the rebel forces led by Bozizé and of the government and the MLC (MRGI 2008). The upheaval and general lack of security have resulted in increased circulation of small arms and a lack of economic opportunities, leading to an increase in banditry (UNHCR 2011:12). Another player in the conflict is the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA), a rebel group that originated in Uganda in the 1980s but has since spread to the Democratic Republic of Congo, South Sudan, and the CAR. Instability has allowed the LRA to gain a foothold in the eastern part of the CAR, where it has perpetrated human rights violations against civilians (UNHCR 2011:12).

All in all, conflict has made life highly unstable for Central Africans since 2001, particularly for northerners. A UNHCR report from 2007 estimated that, at the time, more than 290,000 people had been uprooted from their homes, with 212,000 remaining internally displaced and 80,000 fleeing to Chad, Cameroon, or Sudan (UNHCR 2007b). Some refugees have also made their way to Western countries, primarily to France and the United States (UNHCR 2005). Although this diaspora is unquestionably an important facet of the Central African refugee story, further investigation of the experience of this
community, and of any links it may have to Central African refugees still in Africa or to
those internally displaced within the CAR, is beyond the scope of this study.

Those who have fled the CAR are frustrated with what seems an arbitrary case of
being stuck in the wrong place at the wrong time: “‘The usual pattern is that rebels attack
key towns in the north, the government soldiers take them back and retaliate on the
surrounding villages...We, the civilians, are in the middle and we are paying the
price’” (UNHCR 2007b). However, factors of ethnicity are also involved, meaning that
the violence is not strictly arbitrary. The nomadic Mbororo living in northern CAR were
originally of Chadian origin, and although they have lived in CAR for generations and
hold Central African citizenship, they are “frequently referred to as ‘foreigners’” (MRGI
2008). Bozizé’s flight to Chad heightened the distrust, as Chadians in CAR were
suspected of colluding (MRGI 2008). Mbororo pastoralists are also resented for their
relative wealth in cattle, making them prime targets for bandits (MRGI 2008). Child
abduction is rampant: “the bandits, roaming along roads and trails, kidnap children and
demand crippling ransoms from families. They have to sell valuable cattle to raise the
money” (UNHCR 2007a). By the time Mbororo refugees arrive in Cameroon, they have
often lost everything and “are in an extremely precarious situation”’ (MRGI 2008).

The Cameroonian government estimates that in 2012 Cameroon hosted nearly
104,000 refugees, with around 80,000, mostly from the CAR, located in the East region
(Charles, interview 04/02/12). Because Cameroon is reputed to be a stable and
welcoming country, it is a popular destination for refugees; because the East region
shares a border with the CAR, there are already shared languages and ethnic
characteristics between arriving refugees and their host communities, which facilitates their integration (factors promoting successful integration are discussed in more detail in Chapter Three). This integration is facilitated by a refugee regime that has developed professional strategies for managing refugee flows. In addition to Cameroon and the CAR, this international regime is an important player in the political negotiations that surround the presence of refugees in the East.

Development of the International Refugee Regime

The refugee regime brings with it international perspectives and resources that affect the unfolding of a crisis. To understand the politics involved in a refugee response, it is crucial to recognize that the regime is not always as apolitical and altruistic as its characterization. These international actors may bring relief to those in need, but they are also involved in maintaining the normality of the national order of things by assuring that the border in question and the nation-states to each side remain intact. For these reasons, an understanding of the emergence and development of the international refugee regime is important to the analysis that follows.

A concept of humanitarianism has long existed internationally. Gary Bass highlights early cases such as international activism against the slave trade and nineteenth-century interventions to stop oppression by the Ottoman Empire and Naples (Bass 2008:12, 17). However, the history of the modern refugee regime begins in 1921 with the League of Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. This body is the clearest precursor to the UNHCR, which is the shaping force in the refugee regime’s activities in
 Cameroon today. In the early years of organized humanitarian efforts, main causes of refugee movements included the breakup of major European empires during the 1920s and disinheri- tance of certain groups with the rise of fascism in Europe during the 1930s (Loescher 2001:22-29). These refugee crises were handled individu- ally, with a separate apparatus set up for each case. For example, in 1920 Fridtjof Nansen was appointed High Commissioner for Refugees with responsibility solely for Russian refugees; in 1933 the League of Nations established the High Commissioner for Refugees from Germany (Loescher 2001:24-30). This approach suggests a conception of refugee crises as temporary, solvable, and spontaneous rather than systemic, recurring realities.

The international community continued to think of refugee situations as temporary through the end of World War II. The war left millions displaced and in need of assistance, and both the newly founded United Nations and a plethora of fledgling voluntary agencies sprang into action to reestablish normalcy: “Relief and rehabilitation in Europe were to be for the short term only. Once people were repatriated and adequate resources for rebuilding were provided, it was widely assumed that Western European states could stand on their own feet again and deal with their own problems” (Loescher 2001:35). The UNHCR as we know it today emerged from this context of upheaval in Europe and reacted to specifically European problems. The 1950 Statute and the 1951 Convention, which continue to guide the work of the UNHCR today, were born of this context; their narrow definitions of what constitutes a refugee had to be expanded in the 1967 Protocol. The UNHCR’s scope has been further broadened by the “good offices

37
mandate,” which gives the High Commissioner leeway to assist in a wider range of situations which the UNHCR has the competency to handle.

During the Cold War, the refugee regime did not escape entanglement in the political tensions of the times. “Because refugees constituted visible rejection of their domestic policies, Communist authorities lashed out at the receiving states and refused to cooperate with the UNHCR” (Loescher 2001:54). For similar reasons, Western governments “encouraged the flow from East to West in order to weaken their ideological rivals and gain political legitimacy” (Loescher 2001:54) Later, with the shift to proxy wars in the developing world, aid to refugees became linked to foreign policy and security concerns. For both sides, providing assistance to refugees seemed a good way to ingratiate themselves with newly independent countries and to promote their own ideologies (Loescher 2001:122-123). In these proxy-wars-by-humanitarian-assistance “the developed states were not in danger of confronting masses of Third World arrivals” (Loescher 2001:123). When the refugees involved were from developing countries rather than Communist ones, Western governments preferred sending aid from afar. Refugee interventions in the developing world became a way to contain unrest in regions far from developed countries’ doorsteps.

Although countries in the global North were largely responsible for the creation of the refugee regime, in a post-Cold War context these countries have increasingly established restrictions on immigration and asylum which have prevented refugees from penetrating their borders (Keely 2001). Keely suggests a parallel development of two refugee regimes: one in the global North, which retained the original spirit of the 1951
Convention and concerned itself primarily with refugees from Communist countries; and another in the global South, which dealt with the complex political consequences of decolonization and expanded beyond the Convention definition to deal with a wider range of scenarios of migration and displacement. Post-Cold War, admitting refugees was no longer in the political interest of Northern countries, which instead turned to the refugee regime as a mechanism for managing refugee flows, containing them in the global South. As it deals with situations that the global North has little interest in handling, the UNHCR has become a more powerful and autonomous actor and has “expanded its services to a much wider range of people who [are] in need of assistance including returnees, internally displaced people, war-affected populations, the victims of mass expulsions, and unsuccessful asylum-seekers...Consequently, the UNHCR [has] expanded from a refugee organization into a more broadly-based operational agency driven by emergencies” (Loescher 2001:14-15).

Conclusion

Global systems of governance such as the refugee regime organize around the ideal of the nation-state as distinct, discrete, and sovereign, even when reality does not match this ideal. As the context in which the processes described in this thesis unfold, central Africa’s long history of diversity and migration is important for understanding the constructed nature of the integrated, unified nation ideal. Because that ideal informs how we understand the normal order, we create systems for maintaining and reinforcing it. Refugees, in their statelessness, fall outside of that ideal; the refugee regime, in an almost
ritual manner, uses these abnormal circumstances to reinforce the norm (Gluckman 1967). As it defines refugees’ status, provides them with papers, protects their rights, and seeks “permanent solutions” to re-incorporate them into the system, the regime provides refugees alternatives to existing in the liminal space between states. In so doing, it reaffirms the nation-state system as “natural” and “normal,” and provides cooperating states an opportunity to reinforce their position within that system. The current political realities described in this chapter mean that when violence and upheaval on one side of a border push people to the other side of that border, it sets in motion a chain of events that treat the situation as outside of the norm and in need of corrective action.
Chapter Three
Local Integration, Humanitarian Norms, and Keys to Cameroonian Success

What about the refugee intervention in Cameroon has allowed it to move forward smoothly where other interventions have encountered complications? Part of the answer, as described in Chapter Two, is the context of stability provided by Cameroon’s formidable government. NGOs can implement their programs without worrying about their own safety or the possibility of violence spilling over from the CAR. Within this context of security, however, decisions made by humanitarian and governmental actors also influence how the intervention plays out. In my research, two elements emerged as central to the overall trend of success in the refugee response in Cameroon.

The first of these is the method of accommodating refugees. Refugee camps are common in many refugee situations; of the four crises the UNHCR identified as the most pressing at the end of 2012 - in Mali, South Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Syria - all had prompted creation of refugee camps in neighboring countries (UNHCR 2012). In Cameroon, by contrast, refugees are integrated directly into communities. Successful integration, though not without drawbacks, avoids many of the problems associated with refugee camps, creating the potential for greater success in responding to the needs of refugees. Cameroon meets the criteria identified by scholars such as Sara Feldman and Jeff Crisp (discussed in detail later in this chapter) as necessary for a successful integration effort, and humanitarian workers on the ground attest to integration’s success. The first part of this chapter examines in further detail the factors that have made successful integration possible in Cameroon.
The second element contributing to success is the role played by a professionalized refugee regime in a routinized refugee situation. Outside of the international spotlight and without needing to negotiate around intervening military forces, guerrilla fighters, or competing political factions, NGOs can implement their programs according to humanitarian principles and best practices in a way that is often impossible in other contexts. As humanitarianism has evolved, certain ideas and approaches have gained legitimacy. These ideas include traditional humanitarian principles of humanity, impartiality, neutrality, and independence (Terry 2002) as well as certain best practices that surfaced repeatedly in my interviews, including cultural sensitivity, community participation, and financial accountability. These principles and practices are ingrained in NGO cultures; they are a lens through which humanitarian workers such as my informants understand their role in the situation. The second part of this chapter examines the practices that surfaced as most important in guiding my informants on the ground in Cameroon.

Fiona Terry (2002) and Mary Anderson (1999) both analyze humanitarian intervention at an operational level, scrutinizing the actions of aid organizations in crises around the world. Both authors recognize the dangers of aid and acknowledge that humanitarianism can cause harm, even prolonging the conflicts it seeks to alleviate. Ultimately, however, both scholars affirm that action, despite the risks, is preferable to inaction: Terry promotes imperfect solutions for “a second-best world” while Anderson argues that “it is a moral and logical fallacy to conclude that because aid can do harm, a decision not to give aid would do no harm” (Anderson 1999:2; Terry 2002:216). As I
argue that the routinized response in Cameroon involves innovative solutions for addressing past problems, I align myself with these scholars’ conclusions. This analysis of efforts to build a better humanitarian model lays the groundwork both for understanding the broader development impacts of humanitarian aid, discussed in Chapter Four, and Chapter Five’s discussion of how anthropology can contribute to the refugee regime’s ongoing efforts to work toward better solutions for doing no harm.

Making Local Integration Work in Eastern Cameroon

The Great Camp Debate

Refugee camps “easily qualify as the most conspicuous element of refugee assistance”—they dominate media coverage of refugee emergencies around the world, shaping our notions of what such emergencies look like (Schmidt 2003). Because of their prevalence as a response to refugee situations, camps seem like a logical measure: they contain a refugee influx to prevent it from overwhelming local infrastructures, streamline the provision of aid, and make people easier to track, supervise, and repatriate once things calm down. Sometimes, though, host countries choose not to create camps. In any crisis, local integration happens for those refugees who remain outside of official avenues of assistance and protection. In Cameroon, however, it is intentionally facilitated by the UNHCR and partner NGOs. The choice, and success, of integration as a response to the refugee situation contributes to the beneficial effects of humanitarian aid on Cameroon’s development, a topic explored in Chapter Four.
Humanitarian and scholarly communities increasingly recognize that the vision of a temporary response to refugee movements is unrealistic. Most of the world’s refugees are in “protracted refugee situations,” defined as populations of 10,000 or more restricted to a camp for five years or longer (Feldman 2007:52). Large concentrations of people, over time, create health risks and strain on the local environment; life in camps undermines social patterns and makes it difficult for refugees to interact with local communities; in several cases, refugee camps have become hotbeds of violent activity (Harrell-Bond 1994:15-16). Camps also limit residents’ freedom of movement and access to outside economic opportunities, creating the risk of dependency on aid; because camps are often on marginal land that was not in use for other purposes, opportunities for self-sufficiency are limited (Feldman 2007:52). Despite these recognized drawbacks, camps remain the dominant framework for dealing with refugee situations around the world.

Practitioners have attempted many alternatives to refugee camps. In Africa in particular, between the 1960s and the 1980s many countries granted refugee communities tracts of land on which to create their own new settlements (Crisp 2004:4). These settlements were deemed unsuccessful because they were “unable to achieve or sustain economic self-sufficiency and many refugees [were] not integrated into their host countries” (Clark and Stein 1990). Perhaps due to the perceived failure of that approach, local settlement became a less popular solution in African crises after the 1980s, and refugee camps became the norm (Crisp 2004:4).

Ideas about the viability of local settlements reemerged in models such as Development Assisted Integration (DAI), based on direct integration into host
communities (Feldman 2007:50). “DAI refers to the coordination of refugee assistance with local economic development so that those communities that host refugees can receive additional funding for enabling refugees to settle amongst locals” (Feldman 2007:50). This approach has succeeded in places such as Guinea, where throughout the 1990s the government and UNHCR reinforced local infrastructure and services to benefit communities already hosting self-settled refugees (Van Damme 1995:361). As a consistent solution, however, integration has not yet gained widespread acceptance.

Eastern Cameroon thus provides insight into a search for innovative solutions within the refugee regime; in a context where other factors are stable enough to allow routine operating procedures to be followed, the regime can try and perfect new approaches.

Meeting the conditions for success

In addition to the context of stability, several other factors make eastern Cameroon an ideal location for integration. Scholar Sara Feldman suggests five preconditions that foster success of local settlement as an alternative to refugee camps:

1) the refugee’s right to freedom of movement and right to work are respected by the host government to some degree, 2) the necessary inputs are available for the kind of economic activity in which the refugees will be engaged (such as arable land or job training), 3) the host government supports and is committed to the effort, 4) locals benefit as well as refugees, and 5) there is a place for the refugees in the local economy. [Feldman 2007:66]

Jeff Crisp adds to this framework by suggesting that local settlement is most likely to succeed when refugees share a language, culture, or ethnic origin with the host community (Crisp 2004:6). All of these conditions are in place in eastern Cameroon, making it an ideal location to examine the success of a local-integration model.
Refugees’ rights to freedom of movement and work in Cameroon are protected by the 2005 refugee law, which states that “Pour l’exercice d’une activité professionnelle salariée ou non, et sans exonération d’impôts et de taxes...les personnes reconnues comme réfugiées sont assimilées aux nationaux”\(^5\) and also protects freedom of circulation and the right to obtain identity and travel documents (Loi numero 2005/006). Though there have been several cited cases of authorities refusing to recognize refugees’ identification documentation, and thus curtailing their rights (USCRI 2008), authorities recognize that refugees hold these rights, at least in theory. In an interview with two employees of the Ministry of National Security, one man asked whether refugees in Cameroon had the right to engage in economic activities. The other replied, “Ils doivent vivre, n’est-ce pas? Mais pour s’installer, ils ont besoin de terre, et les autochtones ne veulent pas la donner. Donc il y a des conflits là-dessus”\(^6\) (Quentin, interview 4/25/12).

Since agriculture is the predominant form of economic activity in the East, this question of access to land is crucial. Thus, though refugees’ right to freedom of movement and work is recognized by the Cameroonian government, the exercise of those rights is sometimes curtailed, speaking to the second of Feldman’s criteria.

The main economic input for agriculture is arable land. The East, as the least densely populated region in Cameroon, has land to spare, but gaining access to land is not always easy for refugees. Several NGOs in the East are working on this issue. PU-AMI, for example, “a négocié avec les populations et les autorités locales pour qu’ils [les

\(^5\) “For the exercise of professional activity, salaried or not, and without exemption from taxes, persons recognized as refugees are assimilated with nationals.”

\(^6\) “They have to live, don’t they? But to settle in, they need land, and the local people don’t want to give it to them. So there are conflicts around this issue.”
réfugiés] aient accès à la terre, et on a commencé à faire des distributions de semences.”
(Dominique, interview 4/6/12). PU-AMI also trains refugees in agricultural techniques.
“C’était des éleveurs, donc on a dû vraiment leur faire des formations pour en faire des agriculteurs”
(Dominique, interview 4/6/12). The assistance of NGOs such as PU-AMI helps refugees negotiate both the question of access to economic inputs and of finding a place for themselves in the local economy.

In Cameroon, the question of host government support for refugee assistance effort is the most ambiguous of Feldman’s criteria. Certain officials, such as those from the Ministry of National Security, were frustrated by the presence of refugees. They cited increased instability in the region and complained that international law obligated them to accommodate refugees, no matter their preference. Others, such as a representative from the Ministry of Basic Education, seemed more neutral; while recognizing the importance of providing assistance to vulnerable refugee populations, he also described the challenge their presence posed for already-crowded schools. However, the representative from the Ministry of External Relations, who is in charge of the national office of refugee issues, was very firm in his support for refugee assistance efforts:

J’ai compris que c’est des personnes vulnérables et qui ont besoin de beaucoup d’aide. Quand vous allez dans des pays comme le Rwanda ou même à l’est de Cameroun, vous voyez des gens qui vous disent que ça fait 3 jours, 4 jours, 5 jours qu’ils n’ont pas mangé ou nourri les enfants, ça vous fait compatir à leurs souffrances. Et puis, personne n’est à l’abri de cette situation. Au Cameroun, ici, on peut connaître la situation que connaît le Tchad ou le Centre Afrique. C’est

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7 “negotiated with the populations and the local authorities for the refugees to have access to land, and we’ve started distributing seeds.”

8 “They were herders, so we really had to train them to make them into farmers.”
Such enthusiasm from the government official overseeing cooperation with the UNHCR speaks to the prevailing stance of the government regarding refugee relief efforts.

Mutual benefit for locals and refugees is central to integration in the East. This possibility was, in fact, cited by the representative from the Ministry of External Relations as one reason for avoiding the creation of refugee camps: “Quand les gens sont confinés dans un camp, on voit des camions qui arrivent distribuer la nourriture, mais pas aux autochtones. Les nationaux peuvent se dire, ‘Pourquoi est-ce qu’on nourrisse ceux-là et pas nous?’”

Including local communities in projects was an adjustment that PU-AMI had to make based on experience:

C’est vrai que le Cameroun est un terre d’accueil, mais les camerounais dans les villages ne comprenaient pas que quand les ONG arrivent distribuer les vivres, c’est seulement pour les réfugiés. Mais c’est ça le budget du HCR ! Mais ça a créé des difficultés avec l’intégration. Maintenant on inclut un certain nombre de camerounais dans nos programmes pour les réfugiés, pour établir plus de confiance dans les communautés.

Local integration of refugees makes expansion of aid to Cameroonians more possible:

...
focused organizations. This is illustrated by the two main organizations I researched: though one was focused on refugees, and the other on development efforts, both collaborated with the UNHCR to assist communities hosting refugees. The next chapter expands on this discussion of the impacts of integration on local development processes.

Finally, there is the question of cultural similarity between refugee and host communities. Because refugees are mainly moving directly over the border between the CAR and Cameroon, they are settling into communities of similar ethnic groups. “Les réfugiés ont été intégrés dans des villages de leur propre ethnie. Donc les Mbororo sont dans des villages Mbororo, les Gbaya sont dans des villages Gbaya”12 (Dominique, interview 4/6/12). This ethnic congruity was cited frequently by my informants as a major reason for the success of integration. “Quand vous regardez les réfugiés Mbororo qui viennent du Centrafrique, on a également des populations Mbororo camerounaises. Il n’y a que les frontières qui les ont séparés. Donc ils sont avec leurs frères”13 (Charles, interview 4/2/12). The refugees integrated so well, in fact, that the Ministry of National Security complained about the impossibility of separating the two:

Ce qui rend difficile ce tâche [de sécuriser le pays] pour nous est que les réfugiés centrafricaines sont les mêmes peuples que les communautés camerounaises qu’ils rejoignent - Gbaya, Mbororo, etc. Ils causent les mêmes langues. Donc c’est très difficile de savoir qui est un réfugié - les populations réfugiées se confondent avec les populations hôtes.”14 [Quentin, interview 4/25/12]

12 “The refugees were integrated into villages of their own ethnicity. So the Mbororo are in Mbororo villages, the Gbaya are in Gbaya villages.”

13 “When you see Mbororo refugees who come from the CAR, we also have Cameroonian Mbororo populations. There’s nothing but a border separating them. So they are with their brothers.”

14 “What makes this task of securing the country so difficult for us is that the Central African refugees are the same peoples as the Cameroonian communities they’re joining - Gbaya, Mbororo, etc. They speak the same languages. So it’s very difficult to know who is a refugee - the refugee populations become confused with the host populations.”
Though local integration caused some problems in the eyes of security personnel, for those working with refugees in a humanitarian capacity this seamlessness of integration was a sign that integration was the right choice in this context.

The conditions, as defined by scholars who have observed other integration efforts, thus exist for the success of integration in Cameroon. My informants saw how this benefits refugees. “Nous pensons que, quand les réfugiés sont confinés dans les camps, leur intégration se fait plus lent. On a donc pensé que pour que les réfugiés se trouvent bien intégrés, se trouve en symbiose avec les nationaux, il fallait qu’on ne les met pas dans les camps”¹⁵ (Charles, interview 4/2/12). The choice to try integration rather than camps in eastern Cameroon suggests a growing sensitivity within the regime to the need to tailor solutions to the local context in order to make them as effective as possible.

**Humanitarian Principles and Best Practices**

*Shifts in the culture of the refugee regime*

Simply because the preconditions for success are met, however, does not necessarily mean that success will be achieved. Choices NGOs make in creating and implementing their programs shape what success looks like within this context of integration. These choices also reflect cultural shifts in the regime. The attitudes and principles that guided my informants’ work were not founded on idealistic notions of altruism but rather on best practices developed through decades of experience with successes and failures in other crises. Documentation and analysis of problems that have

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¹⁵ “We think that, when refugees are confined in camps, they integrate more slowly. We therefore thought that for the refugees to truly be integrated, to be in symbiosis with the nationals, it was necessary to not put them in camps.”
arisen in past refugee interventions, by NGOs as well as by scholars, have helped build a better approach, which is now contributing to the success in Cameroon.

My experience with NGOs in eastern Cameroon suggests that the refugee regime is responding to past critiques by adapting its institutional culture. Practices of collaboration between humanitarian actors, cultural sensitivity, community participation, financial accountability and transparency, and close monitoring and evaluation of programs--all identified by scholars as lacking in other interventions (Fassin and Pandolfi 2010; Malkki 1995a; Terry 2002)--featured prominently in my conversations with humanitarian workers in Bertoua. Routinized refugee crises such as that in Cameroon provide a glimpse of how the refugee regime operates under “normal” circumstances, and how NGO policies and practices can contribute to a successful integration effort.

*Inter-organizational collaboration*

With the institutionalization and professionalization of the refugee regime, a proliferation of organizations has become involved in refugee responses around the world. Cameroon is no exception: during my fieldwork, seven years after the initial influx of refugees, fourteen different major international organizations were working with refugees in the East. With this many organizations in place, one could imagine problems as organizations compete for the same work or the same funds; Terry notes that such competition has been the norm elsewhere, such as in Nicaragua and Cambodia (2002). There are, however, systems of collaboration and coordination in place in Cameroon to
mitigate the risks of duplication of efforts or competition between NGOs; these systems try to ensure the most efficient use of everyone’s time and resources.

Systems of coordination are not as elaborate in Cameroon as in other places. “Dans les pays où l’action humanitaire est très développé, il y a un organe des Nations Unies qui s’appelle OCHA [Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs] qui est chargé de coordonner les actions humanitaires. Mais ici OCHA n’est pas présent parce qu’il n’y a pas assez d’attrait humanitaire, on va dire” (Dominique, interview 4/23/12). In the absence of a separate coordinating organization, the UNHCR convenes meetings with the NGOs. “Quand c’est OCHA qui organise les réunions, c’est plus sur la stratégie, il y a plus de réflexion sur les besoins, les réponses, les échanges d’information entre les intervenants. Ici, ça prend souvent la forme de compte rendu d’activités avec le bailleur principal, qui est le HCR” (Dominique, interview 4/23/12). Although the coordination in Cameroon is more informal, it appears effective; the actors share information and build relationships, working in some senses as a team. “C’est une petite communauté, donc on se voit de temps en temps, on connaît les numéros de téléphone respectifs, et s’il y a une question ça ne pose pas de problème” (Dominique, interview 4/23/12).

One important element of this community among humanitarian organizations is the social aspect. Expatriates far from home often build community among themselves

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16 “In countries where humanitarian action is very developed, there is an organ of the UN that is called OCHA [Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs] that is charged with coordinating humanitarian activities. But here OCHA is not present because there is not enough humanitarian appeal, one could say.”

17 “When it’s OCHA that organizes the meetings, it’s more about strategy, there is more reflection on needs, responses, exchanges of information between the intervenors. Here, it often takes the form of a report of activities with the principal donor, which is the HCR.”

18 “It’s a little community, so we see each other from time to time, we know each other’s phone numbers, and if there is a question it doesn’t pose any problems.”
and spend their free time together (Cain, Postlewait, and Thomson 2004). There were several expatriates working in Bertoua, including my primary informants at PU-AMI, who did socialize together. However, the vast majority of NGO employees I encountered were Cameroonian. The influence this demographic makeup had on social relationships between humanitarian NGOs is important but beyond the scope of this study.

Coordination is also facilitated by donor organizations, which institute conditions for how their funds can be used. Especially for donors, such as the UNHCR, that fund projects shared by several organizations in the same region, ensuring a uniform intervention and avoiding unnecessary duplication are priorities:

Donc, on va dire qu’il y a un problème de sécurité alimentaire dans l’Est de Cameroun. Et puis Première Urgence, on va dire que, face à ce problème, on va distribuer de la nourriture. Et puis, IRD [International Relief and Development] va dire, nous, face à ce problème, on va distribuer des semences. Alors, le bailleur, il va dire, bah non. Vous distribuez tous de semences et des outils, pour pas qu’il y a un village avec IRD qui reçoit ça, un village qui reçoit autre chose.19 [Dominique, interview 4/23/12]

Conversely, donors may dictate that organizations work on different projects so that efforts are not duplicated. Domains of intervention are divided among the NGOs in the East. Emergency distribution of food and other supplies, for example, falls to the International Federation of the Red Cross, the Cameroonian Red Cross, and Plan Cameroon. These organizations also undertake education projects by building classrooms and providing teaching materials. A third category of intervention is that of health: building or rehabilititating health clinics. This is handled by the French Red Cross, Africa

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19 “So, let’s say there’s a problem of food security in the East of Cameroon. And Première Urgence says, in response to this problem we will distribute food. And then IRD [International Relief and Development] says we, in response to this problem, will distribute seeds. The donor is going to say, no way! You will all distribute seeds and tools, so that there isn’t one village with IRD that receives one thing and another village that receives something else.”
Humanitarian Action, and International Medical Corps. Water and sanitation, which involves providing safe access to clean water, is worked on by another American organization, International Relief and Development (IRD), as well as PU-AMI. The Spanish Red Cross, as well as IRD and PU-AMI, provide resources to help refugee communities make the transition to an agricultural way of life. A final domain of intervention is community mobilization, which is the focus of the Swiss NGO Fairmed.

Thus, through information-sharing meetings organized by the UNHCR and through strategic distribution of tasks by donor organizations, collaboration with other humanitarian organizations is a part of everyday operating for NGOs in the East. Though many autonomous organizations are involved in the refugee response in the region, working in collaboration was the accepted norm. This suggests the establishment of inter-agency cooperation as a best practice among humanitarian agencies.

Cultural sensitivity

Those working with refugees in the East are keenly aware of the dangers of ignoring cultural particularities when designing programs. One informant related a cautionary tale of something that happened to another, unnamed NGO:

There was a situation in the north of Cameroon. An NGO constructed a water point, and since they thought that it’s good to respect the traditional ruler of the place, the water point was placed in front of the traditional ruler’s house. After some time, they realized that women and children kept going back to those unclean sources of water. So when they decided to find out what was actually happening, women said that they would have preferred that the water point be elsewhere, because in their culture a woman is supposed to be veiled, and a woman is not supposed to go in the presence of men. And at the traditional leader’s place, there were always men sitting there. [Edith, interview 4/13/12]
Had the NGO in this story understood the culture of the people in the area, the well might have been built where it was more useful to the community. Creating culturally sensitive programs was important to everyone I talked to, and everyone was adamant that they were doing their best to avoid the sorts of situations exemplified by the story above.

Efforts to incorporate cultural considerations were evident in NGOs’ program design and implementation. Even during the initial, emergency phase of an intervention, when basic needs such as food and shelter must be met as quickly as possible, NGOs strove to remain sensitive to cultural practices:

Quand on propose de faire des habitations d’urgence dans des pays où la culture implique une séparation homme/femme, même si ce sont des tentes, même si ce sont des choses très provisoires, on doit prendre en compte le fait qu’on travaille avec une culture dans laquelle une femme ne peut pas se dévêtir, ou se dévoiler, devant un homme. Pareil pour les toilettes.20 [Dominique, interview 4/25/12]

Such statements demonstrate recognition that without attendance to cultural norms, programs may create new problems rather than solving old ones.

This is not to say that NGOs prioritize cultural preferences over all other considerations. The question of women’s role in a family and household, for example, is important in Central African refugee communities. “Chez les Mbororo, la femme n’a pas accès à l’argent, ou à l’économie de ménage. Et donc, pour que ces communautés puissent continuer à vivre de façon autonome, il a fallu que les femmes arrivent à gagner de l’argent et à travailler”21 (Dominique, interview 4/6/12). My informant admitted that

20 “When we propose to built emergency shelters in a country where the culture implies a separation of men and women, even if they’re tents, even if they’re very temporary things, we have to consider the fact that we are working with a culture in which a woman cannot undress, or unveil, in front of a man. It’s the same for the toilets.”

21 “Among the Mbororo, the wife doesn’t have access to money, or to the household budget. And so, for these communities to continue living autonomously, it was necessary that the women begin earning money and working.”
by encouraging women to work and manage money, her organization had asked communities to “reviser tout leur code culturel”22 (Dominique, interview 4/6/12). At the same time, PU-AMI tries to respect the most important elements of existing cultural norms. “On a fait aussi attention à ce que l'équilibre culturel, l'homme dominant, qui garde sa fierté et qui aussi apporte à manger à la famille, reste stable”23 (Dominique, interview 4/6/12). Sensitivity to cultural practices, like collaboration, has become part of routine practice for responding to refugee emergencies.

**Community participation**

NGOs in the East are also dedicated to including beneficiaries in program planning. Excludes local people invites cultural misunderstandings and lower participant investment in the long term. NGOs in Bertoua have experienced this problem:

> Il y aura des gens qui ont construit [les latrines] pour faire plaisir à l’ONG, en se disant, bon, il nous demande de faire ça, ça l’air d’être important pour eux, donc, on va le faire. Peut-être que si on leur fait plaisir, ils nous donneront peut-être un forage ou des bassines. Donc, il faut revenir un certain temps pour vérifier que le message a été vraiment absorbé par la plupart de personnes. Et souvent, en premier étape on a 70 pour-cent des villageois qui ont construit des latrines, et puis, deuxième étape il y a 50 pour-cent des villageois qui utilisent les latrines. Il y a une perte entre les deux.²⁴ [Dominique, interview 4/23/12]

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²² “revise their entire cultural code”

²³ “We also paid attention that the cultural balance, with the dominant man who keeps his pride and who also brings food to the family, remained stable.”

²⁴ “There will be people who build [the latrines] to please the NGO, saying to themselves, ok, they’re asking us to do this, it seems important to them, so we’ll do it. Maybe if we please them they’ll give us a well or some bowls. So, we have to come back after a while to make sure the message has really been absorbed by most people. And often, at the first stage we have 70 percent of villagers who have built latrines, and then at the second stage there are 50 percent who are using them. There is a loss between the two.”
Messages from outsiders, even if initially well-received, do not have the staying power of ideas that can be reinforced by the community. For projects to be truly useful to communities, support for them must come from within the community itself.

To avoid situations such as that described above, NGOs include communities in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of projects. Community participation is identified by Plan Cameroon as the central aspect of its identity as an organization.

Plan brings its contribution, but the beneficiaries also contribute for their projects. These groups are responsible for the development of the community. Plan is coming to support the groups in order to achieve their objectives. Plan will not be forever in those communities. Development, for it to be sustainable, you need to be able to empower the beneficiaries to be able to take over when the organization leaves. [Edith, interview 4/13/12]

Plan works with local authorities such as local councils, women’s groups, parent-teacher associations, community development organizations, and water management committees as well as chiefs and local government officials to ensure that their projects fit community needs and expectations and to ensure that communities gain autonomy in managing the projects. By positioning itself in support of community-driven initiatives, Plan ensures that community participation is at the center of its activities.

PU-AMI seeks to make community involvement central to its project implementation as well. This emphasis on community involvement is based on a desire to avoid creating a dependency on aid in the community:

La spécificité, la priorité pour notre ONG, c’est de réagir très vite sur les situations, mais avoir, dès le départ, une intervention qui prend en compte l’autonomie des personnes. C’est-à-dire qu’il faut distribuer de la nourriture, des vêtements, des médicaments, mais on raccourcit au maximum le temps de
distributions d’urgences pour très vite donner une appropriation et une autonomie aux bénéficiaires.25 [Dominique, interview 4/6/12]

PU-AMI, like Plan, consults with community leaders such as traditional chiefs before beginning projects, and holds community meetings to gain input from a wide range of people. One field coordinator at the organization described the FAST method, used by PU-AMI to involve community members in formulating solutions to community needs:

La méthode FAST ne consiste pas à enseigner. On ne dit pas faites ceci, faites cela. Mais on essaie juste à travers des images, on illustre les problèmes qu’il y a au sein de la communauté, la communauté elle-même se reconnaît là, et puis ensemble la communauté propose des solutions pour résoudre ces problèmes. Donc c’est une méthode participative. Parce que si la communauté elle-même participe à la formulation des recommandations, ou bien des solutions des problèmes qui la concerne directement, facilement elle pourra bien appliquer tous les consignes.26 [Pierre, interview 4/23/12]

Though it does not guarantee the success of a program, community participation helps ensure its relevance to the community in question. Programs based on community involvement are clearly the norm for refugee-relief organizations working in Cameroon. These organizations do not import pre-formulated plans for projects; they actively consult with the communities concerned to support them in efforts to address community needs. This speaks to the nature of the “routinized” refugee crisis: the routine does not lie in the format of the programs themselves but in the approach to consulting with local communities to develop solutions.

25 “The specificity, the priority for our NGO is to react very quickly to situations, but to have, from the beginning, an intervention that accounts for people’s autonomy. That is to say that it is necessary to distribute food, clothing, medicines, but we shorten the period of emergency distribution as much as possible to very quickly give an appropriation and an autonomy to the beneficiaries.”

26 “The FAST method doesn’t consist of teaching. We don’t say, do this, do that. But we just try through images, we illustrate the problems within the community, the community recognizes itself there, and then together the community proposes solutions to resolve these problems. So it’s a participatory method. Because if the community itself participates in the formulation of recommendations, or of solutions to the problems that concern it directly, it will easily be able to apply all of the requirements.”
Financial monitoring and accountability

An international refugee relief effort involves large sums of money, and questions may arise about where the funds are going, how they are being managed and whether they might slip into unintended hands. In Cameroon, concerns about corruption are certainly relevant; I will address Cameroon’s history with corruption in more detail in Chapter Four. Serious focus on systems of financial accountability, however, may seem secondary in the face of the urgency and assumed altruistic nature of humanitarian interventions. Putting financial accountability second has caused problems in past interventions, and my research clearly illustrates that systems of financial monitoring are firmly established in the NGOs working with refugees in the East.

The director of PU-AMI expressed to me how crucial the procedures around financial accountability are to the day-to-day operations of the organization:

Tous nos actions doivent être justifiées et motivées. On ne peut pas acheter un produit comme ça en allant au magasin. On doit définir quel produit on doit acheter, et choisir à plusieurs quel fournisseur on va sélectionner. On essaie de garantir au maximum que l’achat ne se fait pas avec la famille, ou avec un peu d’argent qui s'arrête dans la poche. Au niveau administratif, tous les financements sont justifies. Chaque centime.27 [Dominique, interview 4/23/12]

In fact, she said, tracking expenditures and ensuring that all accounts are in order makes up the bulk of the administrative work for office-based employees. Accountability is not expected only of the administration, however; those based in the field also keep close track of all finances. “Les gens qui travaillent sur le terrain font des rapports tous les

27 “All our activities must be justified. You can’t just go into a store and buy a product. You have to define which product you need to buy, and select between several suppliers. We try to maximally guarantee that purchases aren’t made with the family, or with a little bit of money ending up in someone’s pocket. At the administrative level, all our finances are justified. Every cent.”
The account assistant at Plan described with pride the importance of her role in the organization and the necessity of keeping track of expenses and monitoring finances:

On pense qu’on peut créer des activités et les faire parce qu’il y a l’argent dans tel ou tel ligne. Mais il faut toujours leur dire, mais voilà ce que nos plannings d'activités disent, il faut respecter ça. Et ça-là va du paire avec l’argent que je suis appelée à surveiller. Sinon, on aura des problèmes en fin d'année quand le dicte va passer. Donc, c’est une grosse responsabilité. 29 [Geneviève, interview 4/13/12]

Her sense of responsibility within the organization highlights the importance of such account-keeping activities to the organizational identity at Plan.

Both of these organizations also emphasized the central role of donor organizations in enforcing policies about transparency and financial accountability. At Plan, “on doit [tout] présenter aux bailleurs. Il faut vraiment que le suivi soit bien fait pour que les rapports aussi soient exactes avant de les transmettre à la hiérarchie, pour qu’on ne donne pas les mauvais rapports” 30 (Geneviève, interview 4/13/12). Supervision by donors is an equally important reality at PU-AMI: “Les bailleurs font beaucoup d’audits. Ils regardent tous les dossiers, comment on a acheté ça, etc. Et ils vont sur le terrain pour voir s’il y a vraiment un pompe, s’il y a vraiment un point d’eau, et parler

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28 “The people who work in the field make reports every day, we know where they are, what they’re doing, why they’re doing it, what result they have obtained.”

29 “People think they can create activities and do them because there’s money in this or this line [of the budget]. But I have to tell them, look what our plans of activities say, we have to respect that. And that goes hand in hand with the money I’m called on to supervise. If not, we’ll have problems at the end of the year with our reports. So, it’s a big responsibility.”

30 “we have to present everything to the donors. It’s absolutely essential that the supervision is well done so that the reports are exact before we sent them to the hierarchy, so that we don’t give bad reports.”
avec les gens pour savoir s’ils sont contents, s’ils ne sont pas malades” (Dominique, interview 4/23/12). Donors’ monitoring of funds illustrates the firm establishment of policies of financial accountability within the refugee regime; NGOs, and the larger regime structure, understand these policies as crucial to the success of the intervention.

**Flexibility, evaluation, and learning from mistakes**

Evaluations of past humanitarian interventions have suggested that because of their hierarchical structures and need to maintain their reputations, humanitarian NGOs are resistant to change. The culture among humanitarian workers does not encourage admitting to being wrong, so they continue to make the same mistakes (Terry 2002). This idea of a culture of silence seems incongruent with the reality, or at least the ideal reality, of NGOs in eastern Cameroon. Built into the structures of these NGOs are processes for evaluating their programs and adjusting if needed. Such processes appear to promote a culture of openness to honest discussion about the best ways for NGOs to do their work. The approaches of Plan and PU-AMI to revising their programs and learning from mistakes are similar. Both organizations investigate community needs before creating a program and monitor programs throughout their implementation. They evaluate programs at their conclusion as well, to assess their impacts. The director of Plan expressed the importance of adjusting the approach to a project if it is running into difficulties:

Monitoring has to do with verification of our strategy, are we moving towards our objective? If we are not, what is the barrier or what is the blockage? And how can we change to do better? So in that case, you may decide to modify your strategy,

31 “The donors do a lot of audits. They look at all the dossiers, how we bought this or that, etc. And the go into the field to see that there really is a pump, there really is a well, and to talk with the people to see if they are happy, if they’re not sick.”
to add some activities or do things differently or improve on the resources based on your evaluation. [Edith, interview 4/13/12]

At PU-AMI, the administrator in charge of field-based employees meets with them regularly to evaluate their work:

Il faut les écouter pour entendre leurs problèmes, et leur dire, bon, alors, vous avez fait ça, est-ce que vous avez pensé que c’était bien ? Est-ce que vous pensez qu’on aurait pu l’améliorer, le faire mieux ? Est-ce que vous avez eu des problèmes logistique, ou de présentation du projet aux bénéficiaires?32

[Dominique, interview 4/23/12]

In practice, these processes of evaluation and change are undoubtedly messier than these descriptions suggest; human action is imperfect and efforts to transform it seldom work without glitches. The ideal expressed in the above quotes, though, is that these imperfections will be admitted and addressed. This ideal, though it may not work perfectly in practice, is a guiding foundational principle for these organizations.

The difference between the evaluation processes of the two organizations lies in their senses of temporality. Plan, though it hopes that communities and the government will take over its functions eventually, understands its community development work in a longer-term way as compared to strictly humanitarian NGOs. Because they will be present for the foreseeable future, those at Plan can design programs with a longer time frame in mind. Plan’s activities are organized in a five-year strategic plan, with monitoring and evaluation activities calibrated accordingly. Plan has well-established organizational procedures for conducting evaluation activities, involving monthly planning meetings for all staff members.

32 “You have to listen to them to understand their problems, and say to them, ok, you did this, do you think that was good? Do you think we could have improved on it, done it better? Did you have any problems with logistics, or with presenting the project to beneficiaries?”
PU-AMI, on the other hand, sees its presence in Cameroon as directly related to the influx of refugees and will leave when the “crisis” ends. PU-AMI works on one- to two-year contracts with donor organizations, and there is a great deal more uncertainty about which programs will be happening, and who will be involved, at any given time. When a project is renewed, the entire staff of the project must be re-hired. The administration of the organization is made up of expatriates who typically stay for two years at the most, making for frequent transitions in leadership. All of these factors make continuity and consistency of evaluative approaches more challenging at PU-AMI. Though coordination meetings for the administrative staff happened “ideally” once a month, and the organization was in the midst of instituting coordination meetings for field staff, evaluative processes were less institutionalized at PU-AMI than at Plan. At both organizations, however, informants recognized the need to provide objective measures of success, and the “buzzword” status of the phrase “monitoring and evaluation” suggests that this is a current and salient issue in the humanitarian world.

Professionalization and the role of academia

Admittedly, I entered the field with previous notions about humanitarianism. Having read critical scholars such as Fassin (2011) and Terry (2002), I was primed to see the flaws in the delivery of refugee assistance. I expected that humanitarian principles might be compromised in contexts of exceptionality. On the contrary, adherence to proven yet flexible strategies was the expected mode of operating everywhere I visited.
This is not to say that my informants were unaware of the possibility of complications arising with these principles. One PU-AMI employee described what she considered “la question traditionnelle des humanitaires”\(^33\) - when does it become unacceptable to remain silent in the face of human rights violations in the host country, even if that silence can guarantee the ongoing presence of the NGO and continued assistance of people in need (Dominique, interview 4/23/12)? Different NGOs, she admitted, answered this question differently. So far, however, she had not encountered such a situation in Cameroon. Others, particularly younger professionals who had completed academic training in humanitarianism, seemed to echo precisely the scholarly critiques I had read: “Il y a des réussites, il y a des impacts positifs. Mais aussi des impacts négatifs, Hein ? Ça arrive”\(^34\) (Monique, interview 4/18/12).

One explanation for the widespread acceptance of these core values and awareness of the potential hazards of humanitarian work is the very existence of degrees and specialized training specific to this field: “L’humanitaire a évolué. Le métier s’est fortifié. Puisque, quand j’ai commencé on était volontaires, il y avait un certain amateurisme, en fait. On peut le dire. Et maintenant, mes jeunes collègues, qui sont avec moi, ont quasiment tous fait des études spécifiques humanitaires”\(^35\) (Dominique, interview 4/25/12). Over time, the refugee regime has professionalized and certain methods have become standard. The humanitarian profession is intertwined with

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\(^{33}\) “The traditional question of humanitarians”

\(^{34}\) “There are successes, there are positive impacts. But also negative impacts, you know? That happens.”

\(^{35}\) “Humanitarianism has evolved. The profession has gotten stronger. Because, when I began we were volunteers, there was a certain amateurism, in fact. One could say. And now, my young colleagues who are with me, have practically all done studies specific to humanitarianism.”
humanitarian fields of study: the language used and ideas expressed by my informants illustrated the influence of scholars who have critiqued other refugee responses. This affirms the importance of academic study of humanitarian work, as well as the impacts such study has on policy-making. Academic discourses have real effects on the ground, whether or not that is their intent; I return to this discussion in Chapter Five.

Conclusion

This chapter has drawn on my interviews with employees of NGOs in Bertoua to examine what they understand to be working well in the refugee response in eastern Cameroon. Although no such long-term international undertaking can ever proceed completely smoothly, at least from my informants’ perspective the integration of refugees into Cameroonian communities is fairly successful. This situation provides an important case study of integration as a viable alternative to refugee camps, and a glimpse of how NGOs can draw on best practices to facilitate that integration. In this case, practitioners observe that their actions in the context of local integration have had positive outcomes for Central Africans seeking refuge in eastern Cameroonian communities.

Obviously, things in Cameroon could always be better; otherwise, the NGOs would not still be present. As they continue to help build stronger and more autonomous communities, however, my informants recognize that Cameroon is something of a uniquely good place to be a humanitarian worker:

Globalement je dirais que travailler au Cameroun, c’est relativement facile. Puisque, déjà c’est un des rares pays d’intervention humanitaire où il n’y a pas de problèmes de sécurité. Le niveau de l’éducation au Cameroun est très bon, donc on a des collègues qui sont bien formés. Le climat est bon, la nourriture est bonne.
It is this relatively secure and conducive environment that allows the refugee regime to work according to standard procedures in this routinized emergency. Cameroon thus provides insight into the ideals currently guiding the work of the refugee regime as well as approaches the regime can take to creating more innovative and effective solutions in other contexts.

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36 “Overall I would say that working in Cameroon is relatively easy. Because, already it’s one of the rare countries of humanitarian intervention where there aren’t security problems. The level of education in Cameroon is very good, so we have colleagues who are well trained. The climate is good, the food is good. It’s really a country that is rather welcoming. So on the mission in Cameroon, to tell the truth, we’re pretty content with our lot.”
Chapter Four

Humanitarianism, Development, and Cameroonian State-Building

The UNHCR and its network of international partner NGOs in eastern Cameroon bring with them an array of resources. These resources are financial and material, in the form of distribution of goods or creation of new infrastructure. But they are also less tangible - career development for employees of the NGOs, capacity-building for local agencies, increased prestige or legitimacy in the eyes of the international community for the host country. These less-tangible outcomes of a refugee response are often not explicitly included in the goals of an intervention. However, these “unintended consequences” or “side effects” of humanitarian action may be some of the most significant outcomes of a refugee response and thus should not be overlooked in analysis of the situation. The benefits of the international humanitarian presence, through the medium of a successfully handled integration effort, extend beyond the humanitarian space into Cameroon’s processes of development and nation-building; these development benefits in turn bolster Cameroon’s position within the national order of things.

Theoretical Understandings of Effects of International Aid

Fiona Terry, in Condemned to Repeat, presents several cases of militarization of refugee camps as illustrative of the inherent paradox of humanitarian action: “it can contradict its fundamental purpose by prolonging the suffering it intends to alleviate” (Terry 2002:2). When this occurs, humanitarian action fails in its stated goal of protecting the vulnerable and alleviating suffering. It does, however, have other impacts:
it contributes to war economies and provides a humanitarian sanctuary from which guerrilla groups can stage their subversive activities. Terry’s work highlights the capacity of humanitarianism to unintentionally affect the societies in which it is carried out.

James Ferguson (1990) has also examined the unintended “side effects” of aid, in the context of rural development projects in Lesotho. He concludes that “failed” development projects often reinforce state power by increasing governmental presence in and access to the rural regions where the projects take place. The stated goals and explicitly “apolitical” nature of the projects obscure these “collateral” outcomes, which are in fact extremely political in nature. As a result, the development industry becomes an “anti-politics machine,” employing apolitical messages to disconnect the industry’s actions from their political effects.

The conclusions of both scholars are relevant for examining the “side effects” of aid in eastern Cameroon. It is especially significant that, because of integration, the international resources brought into Cameroon go directly into Cameroonian host communities. Though the stated goals of the refugee regime may be humanitarian in nature, the political ramifications of bringing these resources into the picture should not be ignored. Putting Ferguson in conversation with Terry suggests that the unintended political consequences of humanitarian interventions can be as significant as the political consequences of a rural development project. Resources flow to local communities in ways that are both explicit and obscured, and influxes of financial resources inevitably have political consequences. Furthermore, focusing international attention and resources on a marginal border region presents an opportunity for the state to strengthen its
presence at the periphery of its territory. The discourse of neutrality surrounding refugee responses often means that these political consequences go unexamined.

However, a recent study of the Dadaab refugee camp in Kenya does assess the impacts of the camp on the host community (Government of Denmark et al. 2010). The study concludes that the response to the large-scale influx of refugees from Somalia holds significant social and economic opportunities for surrounding communities, and that local Kenyans have been capitalizing on and benefitting from these opportunities (Government of Denmark et al. 2010). However, the study also concludes that “there is a need to further integrate the support provided to refugees with that provided to host communities. A short-term humanitarian approach to support is not conducive to meaningful development of the host area” (Government of Denmark et al. 2010:79).

The refugee influx and humanitarian response in eastern Cameroon holds similar opportunities for host communities as the Dadaab camp in Kenya. However, integration of refugees in Cameroon addresses the problems identified by the Dadaab study. This aspect of the situation in Cameroon creates an opportunity for the resources accompanying the refugee response to benefit Cameroon. Those benefits, though perhaps understood by NGOs as tangential byproducts of their true humanitarian purpose, are some of the most salient impacts of the refugee regime’s presence in Cameroon.

**International Aid and Resource Flows**

What kinds of resources are flowing into Cameroon through the international community’s presence, and where do these resources come from? Once they arrive in
Cameroon, where do they go; do some groups benefit more than others? Understanding the resource flows involved is crucial to exploring the secondary effects of such a sudden influx of aid. This section presents a rather cursory overview of the flows of financial resources entering Cameroon in response to the presence of refugees; more detailed examinations of state-level and local economic implications of the refugee response is beyond the scope of my research, but would be a fruitful area for further investigation.

The UNHCR, as the most visible international refugee-assistance agency, serves as the main conduit for refugee aid funds flowing into Cameroon. The UNHCR receives most of its donations from UN member states. In 2011, the most recent year for which confirmed data on the UNHCR’s work in Cameroon is available, the UNHCR received US$ 63,000 in contributions earmarked specifically for Cameroon (UNHCR 2011b:17). It supplemented these contributions with additional funds from unearmarked donations, for a total budget of US$ 23,947,527 (UNHCR 2011b:17; UNHCR 2012a:15).

Though this may seem a sizable sum, the UNHCR budget for Cameroon cannot equal that of high-profile situations in the Democratic Republic of Congo, which had a 2011 UNHCR budget of US$ 150,921,401, or the Sudans, with a 2011 total of US$ 232,472,193 (UNHCR 2012a:75). Indeed, 2011 expenditures in Cameroon represented less than six percent of the UNHCR’s budget for Central Africa and the Great Lakes, and about one percent of the UNHCR’s total budget for Africa (UNHCR 2012a:75). The benefit of a large and well-known organization such as UNHCR is that it can distribute funds according to need, ensuring that situations such as that in Cameroon are not completely overlooked when donors are more interested in higher-profile situations.
The UNHCR’s budget in Cameroon finances its own activities, such as provision of identification documents; supports its in-country offices and staff; helps finance the creation of a national framework for determination of refugee status; and funds the projects of implementing partner organizations, the largest portion of the budget (UNHCR 2011b:17). The UNHCR is an important donor for these partner organizations, but most have other funding sources as well. Some organizations have “fonds propres” - donations they receive independently. Plan, for example, maintains a child-sponsorship program to receive donations from individuals in wealthier countries. Other organizations, such as PU-AMI, rely mainly on donor organization grants. In addition to the UNHCR, PU-AMI receives funding from Europaide, the European Union, ECHO (the European Community Humanitarian Office), UNICEF, the World Health Organization, the embassies of France, the US, and Sweden, and various foundations and corporations. Understanding where the funds for a humanitarian intervention come from is important because of the strings that usually come attached to aid; conditions on how funds can be used will be different for money coming from a government versus a foundation versus individual donors. The funding conditions they must work with affect how independent humanitarian organizations can be in practice.

Once these funds reach the NGOs, they are mainly used for two things: maintaining the organization and implementing its programs. The first of these activities includes costs for administrative supplies (paper, pens, printer ink, etc), purchasing and maintaining vehicles, and paying staff salaries. All of this has implications for local economies, through buying supplies or hiring local internet and air conditioning
technicians, for example. Perhaps most significantly, these organizations create employment opportunities, building human capital and incorporating more people into a wage-labor system reported to have a 30 percent unemployment rate\(^3^7\) (Central Intelligence Agency, n.d.). Salaries paid to the staff of these organizations also make their way into local economies as these people purchase goods and services.

The second component of NGOs’ budgets, that of implementing projects in the field, is what comes to mind most readily when we imagine where international aid goes. In Bertoua and in rural villages throughout the East, financial resources are transformed into infrastructure such as wells, latrines, classrooms, and health clinics; into emergency relief such as food aid, seeds to plant gardens, or hygiene kits; and into human capital through trainings and education. While the obvious targets of this aid are refugees, Cameroon’s refugee integration model means that aid benefits Cameroonian communities as well. This means that the effects of the international presence in the East go much deeper than what is immediately visible: this presence has important implications for processes of national development. Investments that the refugee regime makes in Cameroonian villages\(^3^8\) lessen the government’s need to make those same investments. Those investments happen at a number of levels, from direct assistance to human capital

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\(^3^7\) This is not to say that 30 percent of Cameroonians have no way to make a living. As is true in many African contexts, the informal sector plays a significant role in local economies. By creating jobs in the formal section, however, the refugee regime links Cameroon more firmly to the normativity of the formal wage-labor system.

\(^3^8\) I recognize that the refugee regime is likely not the only international actor making such contributions in Cameroon. There are, for example, international development agencies also present in the East. There may be other contributions from the international community as well; for example, China has made direct contributions to industry and business in many African countries. I restrict my analysis in this thesis, however, to the contributions made by organizations whose work relates to the refugee response.
building to governmental consulting, all supported by the international resources attracted to Cameroon by the presence of refugees.

**Impacts of the Refugee Regime beyond the Humanitarian Space**

*Direct assistance and creation of infrastructure*

As resources enter Cameroon through the processes described above, they have a variety of effects. The most obvious, because it is the most explicit goal, is providing direct aid to refugees, who often require initial assistance to feed and house themselves. Distributions of food or seeds or hygiene kits, though once consumed they are gone, help communities avoid large-scale malnutrition and disease, which would put strain on social support systems. NGOs also create more lasting structures, including wells, latrines, health clinics, and school buildings or classrooms. This new infrastructure benefits both refugees and Cameroonians, improving the quality of life in communities that lacked such amenities before the arrival of the refugees. “Quand les réfugiés partiront, ils ne vont pas amener les centres de santé chez eux. Ils vont les laisser ici. Ça fait un développement significatif du pays”39 (Charles, interview 4/2/12). Charles, as a government representative, demonstrates a recognition at the level of the government of the significance of this direct assistance to the development of Cameroon.

The fact that amenities created by international NGOs are available to both refugees and host communities is important. The refugee-integration model detailed in Chapter Three is a significant factor influencing how outside resources impact

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39 “When the refugees leave, they won’t take the health centers with them. They will leave them here. That represents a significant development of the country.”
Cameroon’s development. If camps existed, infrastructure built for refugees would do less to benefit Cameroonian communities. Because refugees live within those communities, however, resources are shared:

“You see first of all the Cameroonian population that only has access to one well. The resources aren’t sufficient even for the Cameroonians, with the refugees that’s going to create problems. That’s why almost all the projects now are really to benefit the two communities. A health center, we’re never going to say that this is the refugees’ health center, this is the health center for the Cameroonians. The whole community has access to the health center.”

Including Cameroonians in NGOs’ programs is seen as a way to better serve refugees and facilitate their integration. This interpretation, however, does little to acknowledge the effects of international actors and resources on the development of Cameroon.

The contributions of the international community to Cameroon’s development are tied to the idea of burden-sharing. This concept, that the international community has a duty to assist countries hosting a large number of refugees, is well-established in the African context through such documents as the 1969 OAU Convention. Burden-sharing is on the minds of the Cameroonian administration: “Il y a la partage de la charge. ‘Burden-sharing.’ C’est-a-dire qu’on accueille 104,000 réfugiés aujourd’hui, avec très peu de moyens. Alors, on aimerait que les pays occidentaux nous viennent en aide pour pouvoir régler ce problème” (Charles, interview 4/2/12).

40 “You see first of all the Cameroonian population that only has access to one well. The resources aren’t sufficient even for the Cameroonians, with the refugees that’s going to create problems. That’s why almost all the projects now are really to benefit the two communities. A health center, we’re never going to say that this is the refugees’ health center, this is the health center for the Cameroonians. The whole community has access to the health center.”

41 “There is the partage de la charge. Burden-sharing. That means that we welcome 104,000 refugees today, with very few means. So, we would like the Western countries to come to our aid in order to regulate this problem.”
Interestingly, as the term “burden-sharing” has come into popular usage, its focus has shifted from African countries sharing the burden of their neighbors, as the OAU Convention suggests, to target the “pays occidentaux.” As a way for Western countries to help with problems in the developing world without having to physically take action, burden-sharing is an expression of the ties between humanitarianism and international struggles for power and influence (Zolberg et al. 1989). As the contributions of Western countries mediate the added burden of hosting refugees, they also aid the Cameroonian government in achieving its development goals. “Maintenant que le HCR a investi à la place du gouvernement camerounais, l’argent qui pouvait servir à la construction de ce centre de santé, de ces écoles, on peut le mettre ailleurs” (Charles, interview 4/2/12).

The international presence responding to the refugee influx opens opportunities for development that would otherwise not be available to the Cameroonian government.

**Concerns about corruption**

Although aid is ostensibly brought into Cameroonian communities to meet the needs of refugees, extending that aid to also benefit host communities is an intentional action. In this sense these development impacts are not truly unintended side effects; they are tacit outcomes of the intervention but not subversive ones. NGOs are, however, concerned that their resources could be put to illicit uses without their knowledge. One PU-AMI employee put it bluntly: “On sait bien qu’au Cameroun il y a beaucoup de

42 “Western countries”

43 “Now that the HCR has invested in the place of the Cameroonian government, the money that could have served to construct this health center, these schools, we can put it elsewhere.”
corruption” (Dominique, interview 4/6/12). In 1998, Transparency International named Cameroon the most corrupt country in the world in its annual Corruption Perceptions Index; in 2011 Cameroon still ranked 134th out of 182 countries in terms of transparency. NGOs must consider this reputation in planning and implementing their programs: how can they ensure that their resources can make the most positive impact while avoiding contributing to corruption? If organizations are not careful, it might happen that “on se vante de faire une aide directe aux populations, et du coup, on fait une aide aux gens de l’état qui ne sont pas forcément en aide” (Dominique, interview 4/6/12).

These concerns are most notable in NGOs’ interactions with government administrations. NGOs have differing perceptions of appropriate ways to relate to the government. For example, Plan’s work is based on very close interactions with the government: “Plan came to Cameroon to support the government initiative; that’s why the protocol agreement was signed with the government. We are bound to collaborate with those government structures” (Edith, interview 4/10/12). Plan sees the government as holding ultimate responsibility for the work Plan does, so the two must work in close collaboration until the government is able to take over. PU-AMI, while also believing that its work in Cameroon is temporary and must eventually be taken over by local actors, is more hesitant about close collaboration with the government. “Soutenir les interventions de l’état, comment peut-on le faire sans mettre le doigt dans un encoignure de

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44 “Everyone knows that there is a lot of corruption in Cameroon.”

45 “We boast of giving direct aid to the populations, and suddenly we’re aiding representatives of the state who aren’t necessarily in need.”
corruption?”  

(Dominique, interview 4/6/12). PU-AMI must consider this question carefully before engaging too closely in government partnerships.

The director of PU-AMI identified a scenario that is common when working with government employees in Cameroon:

Il y a une demande quasi-systématique des fonctionnaires de l’état, quand on leur demande de s’appliquer sur certains problèmes, ils ne le font qu’en moyen en finance. Or, c’est leur travail, ils sont payés pour ça. Donc, on trouve que c’est un peu curieux d’être obligé de les repayer pour qu’ils fassent juste leur travail. Et d’évidence, on évalue que le fait de leur repayer crée des dysfonctionnements et ça nourri quelque chose de malsain dans le pays.  

(Dominique, interview 4/25/12)

The fact that government employees expect NGOs to pay them a per diem, and that the NGOs need their cooperation to carry out their work in compliance with Cameroonian law, puts the NGOs in a tricky situation. Effective work requires governmental cooperation; at the same time, the resources NGOs invest in Cameroon are intended to directly benefit refugees, not government employees who already receive a salary.

Concerns about corruption are present not only in NGO-government interactions, however. Daniel Jordan Smith’s observations on corruption in Nigeria help illustrate other contexts where corruption comes into play. Smith argues that much of what we view as “corruption” is simply the expression of a different relational system that is at odds with the bureaucratic, hierarchical structures of Western-style democracies (Smith 2008). Systems of patron-clientism, in which status or wealth is achieved based on who

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46 “Supporting the interventions of the state, how can we do that without stepping into a trap of corruption?”  

47 “There’s a practically systematic demand from functionaries of the state, when we ask them to help with certain problems, they won’t do it unless we pay them. But, this is their job, they’re paid for this. So, we find it a bit curious to be obliged to repay them to get them to do their jobs. And clearly, we observe that the fact of repaying them creates dysfunction and that feeds into something unhealthy in the country.”
you know, are cast as corruption within bureaucratic systems where achievements are supposedly based on what you can do (Smith 2008). The title of Smith’s 2008 book, *A Culture of Corruption*, refers to the idea that these relational systems are built into the cultural assumptions of society, making them difficult to combat (Smith 2008).

Expatriates working in Cameroon note a similar phenomenon in their interactions with Cameroonians who have a different understanding of appropriate behavior in an organizational bureaucracy. National employees of international NGOs are trained into organizational systems of transparency and finance management to ensure that money is used in fair and ethical ways (as defined by organizational policy).

Although none of my informants even hinted that humanitarian aid itself might be fueling corruption in Cameroon (examples they gave were of corruption in other contexts, or of how they were avoiding pitfalls of corruption), clearly concerns about this possibility exist. Problems of corruption with humanitarian aid have been documented in other refugee crises (Andreas 2008), which may contribute to caution around the issue in Cameroon. While a detailed tracing of the use of resources for refugee aid in Cameroon is beyond the scope of this study, it is important to note that diversion of resources by corruption is sometimes an unintended side effect of humanitarian interventions and that concerns about corruption are prevalent in the Cameroonian context.

*Capacity-building*

Not all benefits brought to Cameroon by the refugee regime are as tangible as financial resources or new infrastructure. Another important and lasting contribution of
international organizations is investment in human capital. The refugee regime, and the UNHCR in particular, constructs itself as a repository of expertise on the subject of refugees and humanitarian responses, and endeavors to share that expertise with local actors (Loescher 2001). This is in large part an attempt to ensure some sustainability of efforts after the eventual departure of the international NGOs. Capacity-building happens on a number of levels, from the community to the governmental, but the main beneficiaries in all cases are Cameroonians. Some capacity-building is part of the goals of these organizations, but other forms are less overt. This is not to say that the capacity-building work of NGOs is somehow secretive or negative, but it is not often a recognized effect of a humanitarian intervention. NGOs are not explicit about the role they play in building the careers of locals employed in the non-profit sector, or increasing the legal and practical knowledge of government employees working to domesticate human rights law. These very important contributions to local contexts, however, deserve attention.

Contributions to Cameroonian human capital begin at the community level through the field activities of NGOs. While many projects involve a material aspect, such as distributing food or agricultural supplies, they also often involve a sensitization campaign to educate communities and build local autonomy. NGOs have held trainings in agricultural techniques to build the agricultural capacity of newly-settled refugees and hand-washing campaigns to improve hygiene and health outcomes in local communities. These sensitization campaigns, while often aimed at helping refugees settle into their new environment, can build the knowledge base of Cameroonian communities as well.
Field activities can also strengthen existing local leadership. NGOs work with local chiefs and community leaders so that projects will hold legitimacy in the eyes of the community. Resources are often disbursed through the framework of existing local forms of governance, and local leaders receive additional training in how to effectively manage these resources. While these leaders certainly need no legitimation from international organizations to hold power in their local systems of governance, the training they receive from international NGOs ties them into kinds of systems that mesh with the bureaucratic functioning of the state, which may increase their legitimacy outside their communities and strengthen the state apparatus.

Capacity-building also happens among Cameroonian employees of the NGOs themselves. Although many of my informants claimed motivations based on altruism and helping the vulnerable, at least as many said that they worked in humanitarianism because it was the most viable career path for them--their training or education was in fields related to humanitarianism. "Ce qui me motive, c’est de me dire que c’est mon travail, que c’est ce pour quoi je me suis formée, c’est l’expérience que j’ai eu" (Natalie, interview 04/18/12). Many of the Cameroonian NGO employees talked about the difficulties of high unemployment rates in Cameroon; they stumbled into humanitarian work because that is what was available. "J’étais au quartier, je n’avais rien à faire. C’est comme ça qu’un jour, il y a un ami qui m’appelle, il me dit, ‘J’ai le Cameroon Tribune devant moi, on a besoin d’un assistant comptable à Plan Cameroon."

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48 "What motivates me is saying to myself that this is my job, this is what I was trained for, this is the experience that I’ve had.”
Est-ce que ça t’intéresse ?”49 (Gabrielle, interview 04/13/12). The experience of these informants illustrates that NGOs’ ability to create local jobs is a benefit to the host country. Once workers are hired, they benefit from career development and skill-building as part of their positions in the organizations. They develop valuable skills, from leading and organizing teams of employees to running educational campaigns in communities to producing and submitting formal reports on their activities. These skills, as well as their association with a well-regarded international agency, will serve them well throughout their careers. “Je travaille pour Plan à cause de la qualité de sa prestation. Aujourd’hui, je peux dire que si je pars de Plan, je vais partir avec quelque chose, cette expérience. Et, sincèrement, je voulais le nom de Plan dans mon CV”50 (Henri, interview 04/13/12).

NGOs also build capacity for other NGOs, developing the local NGO landscape that will take over upon the departure of international organizations. PU-AMI, for example, has an ongoing partnership with a small local organization that is involved in many similar projects. A PU-AMI staff member meets with the organization at least once a month to discuss such topics as transparent financial management. PU-AMI also periodically evaluates the organization’s activities, and helps the organization review what is working well and what could be improved. Through this partnership, PU-AMI hopes to impart its knowledge about how to run a successful and ethical NGO and to build local capacity to tackle local problems.

49 “I was at home, I didn’t have anything to do. Then one a friend called me, he said ‘I have the Cameroon Tribune in from of me, they need an accounts assistant at Plan Cameroon. Does that interest you?’”

50 “I work for Plan because of the quality of its reputation. Today, I can say that if I leave Plan, I will leave with something, this experience. And, honestly, I wanted the name of Plan on my CV.”
International organizations also invest in Cameroonian human capital through their work with government representatives. NGOs’ projects often involve relevant administrations: a project to build a classroom would work with the Ministry of Basic Education, at least ensuring that the Ministry is well-informed about any activities that might affect its work. Cooperation with governmental administrations sometimes requires providing further training for government employees. For example, Plan might train the Ministry of Public Health in handwashing procedures to help them oversee implementation of health recommendations. This kind of training brings local government officials into the fold of the “proper” way to do things as defined by the international organizations through their sensitization efforts.

A final capacity-building effect of the international presence in the East happens on the level of government more abstractly. This aspect relates to Cameroon’s ability to implement international norms domestically. The UNHCR has supported and guided Cameroon through the process of establishing the 2005 refugee law and creating the governmental commissions that will implement it (the UNHCR, for instance, is one of the main funders supporting the creation of the commissions). In its capacity as the keeper of international norms related to refugees, the UNHCR sees ushering Cameroon toward more autonomy in refugee issues as its proper role. The representative from the Ministry of External Relations expressed the need for this guidance; how, he asked, could Cameroon ever conduct refugee status determinations itself if no one in the government knew the proper procedures? The UNHCR, as an international organization with decades of experience in diverse international contexts, has precedents on which to draw in
consulting with the Cameroonian government on the establishment of these procedures. In doing so, it builds the capacity not only of the Cameroonian employees it hires but of government functionaries and the administration itself.

**Solidifying governmental influence at the peripheries**

Jacobsen, in asking whether refugees can benefit the state, points out that the resources a refugee response brings to the host country may be difficult to access because refugees often inhabit peripheral regions less fully integrated into the centralized control of the state (2002). This is certainly the case in Cameroon; the East region has earned the nickname “the forgotten province” for the low levels of government attention and resources focused there. The East, as a border region, is marginal to the state apparatus centered in Yaoundé. While the East’s peripheral nature has previously made it of less concern to the Cameroonian state, it also makes it a fruitful site for solidification of government control and reinforcing of boundaries.

For most of the history of central Africa, state borders as we know them did not exist and movement was a normal part of people’s livelihood. As described in Chapter Two, Gbaya and Mbororo people spent time in areas that now fall into both Cameroon and the CAR, without external regulation of their travels. Today, movements across national borders generate more attention and concern. Maintaining defined boundaries is a central criterion of international standards of statehood, and refugees are dangerous in that they highlight the permeability of those boundaries (Fassin 2011; Malkki 1995a). An
influx of refugees presents states with the need and the opportunity to reinforce their presence in peripheral areas and to strengthen their borders (Jacobsen 2002).

The influx of refugees, combined with concerns about spillover violence, has prompted an increased government presence in the East. More security personnel have been sent to the region to deal with bandits in refugee settlements and conflicts between host communities and refugees (UNHCR 2009). In 2008, government forces secured the Cameroon-CAR border to prevent further cross-border raids by bandits (Parmar et al. 2012:975). Government control in the region is certainly not perfect; Ministry of National Security personnel complain about the difficulty of classifying and keeping track of people (Quentin, interview 4/25/12). “Un grand problème de sécurité dans la région est la maîtrise de la nationalité. Parce que la sécurité passe par la maîtrise de la nationalité, il faut savoir qui est camerounais et qui ne l’est pas pour pouvoir sécuriser le pays”51 (Quentin, interview 4/25/12). Although this process still poses challenges for national security forces, the perceived need to classify and categorize people to keep a firm grip on the region is a sign of crystallization of government power in the area.

Such expansion of governmental power to the East reinforces Ferguson’s argument:

      Outcomes that at first appear as mere ‘side effects’ of an unsuccessful attempt to engineer an economic transformation become legible in another perspective as unintended yet instrumental elements in a resultant constellation that has the effect of expanding the exercise of a particular sort of state power while simultaneously exerting a powerful depoliticizing effect. [Ferguson 1990:20-21]

51 “One big security problem in the region is control of nationality. Because security depends on control of nationality; we have to know who is Cameroonian and who isn’t in order to secure the country.”
Certainly, cementing government control at the margins of Cameroon’s territory was not explicit in the plan of the UNHCR and its NGO partners. In this sense, any reinforcing of Cameroonian state power is unintended and tangential to the “true” purpose of the international community’s presence in the country. It is precisely the invisibility granted by that tangentiality that makes these political effects so powerful. Expansion of government control to the East, when linked to the refugee response effort, does not overtly appear to be a political move, no matter its collateral political consequences. An increased security presence in the region to monitor unstable conditions such as the presence of bandits may be warranted; however, it also lends itself to increased surveillance of Cameroonian citizens by a government that has proven itself less than forgiving of any activities it considers subversive.

Conclusion

The reinforcing of state power in the East that occurs in conjunction with the refugee response is an overarching political consequence of the international presence in the region. As NGOs channel international resources to provide necessities, salaries, business, and infrastructure to local communities, they contribute to the development of the East and bring it more in line with levels of development nationwide. Contributions to Cameroon’s development also raise its status at an international level, helping it conform to ideals of an autonomous, sovereign state. NGOs also build Cameroonian human capital, training those who will run the national non-profit sector as well as those who administer the government at local and national levels. Finally, the focused attention and
energy that the presence of international actors brings to the “forgotten province” of the East creates incentive for the government to regulate and control this border area and to enforce the boundary between Cameroon and the CAR. A stricter security presence helps keep out bandits, but also imposes government standards of control on the region. All of these effects, while not included in the altruistic discourse surrounding the intervention, combine to allow Cameroon to incorporate the East more fully into the state, and to reaffirm its very statehood by extending greater influence over this border region.
Chapter Five
Applied Anthropology, Policy-Making, and Studying Success

Chapter Three looked at evidence of the refugee regime’s shifts toward a routinized intervention process in Cameroon. Such movement to a professionalized, evidence-based approach is the result of conscious efforts among practitioners and decision-makers to make their work more effective (Darcy et al. 2013). After mistakes made in earlier crises, the regime has responded to critiques by developing more innovative and effective models. These shifts raise questions about the role of anthropology in influencing practical decision-making and about the ethics of applied anthropology. My thesis, as it examines the regime’s approach in Cameroon, enters into this conversation about evaluation and humanitarian policy. My own observations and suggestions that the professionalization of humanitarianism will further blur the distinction between academic and applied anthropology; academic critiques of humanitarianism, whether they intend to or not, have tangible effects on policy. The interplay between academic critique, practitioner evaluation, and policy implementation is key to understanding the dynamics at play when a professionalized international regime responds to a routinized refugee crisis such as that in eastern Cameroon.

Anthropology in the World of Evaluation and Policy Making

Humanitarian decision-making

In 2012, Tufts University and the Assessment Capacities Project (ACAPS) undertook a study on “The Use of Evidence in Humanitarian Decision Making” (Darcy et
al. 2013). The impetus for the study was the shifting nature of humanitarian decision-making processes:

The pressure to demonstrate that responses and claims about impact are grounded in evidence has been growing over recent years. Humanitarian donors are increasingly under similar pressures to those faced by other public sector colleagues...to demonstrate effectiveness and account for impact in ways that they have not previously been expected to do. [Darcy et al. 2013:5]

Recognizing that humanitarian decisions are often made in “non-ideal” contexts, the study examines how decision-makers currently use the information at their disposal to make “well enough” informed decisions given the circumstances. There is a new emphasis on using evidence, from the crisis at hand and from past crises, to inform the choice of intervention in a given case.

“In the past, responding to crises consisted of a small number of prepackaged interventions, thought to be the viable options for responding, yet not based on much evidence (Levine and Chastre 2004). Major changes have occurred in the humanitarian sector over the last decade or so” with regards to tailoring the intervention to the specific context of the crisis (Darcy et al. 2013:25). Ideally, decision-makers draw on evidence from a variety of sources when making decisions about how to approach a specific crisis, including pre-crisis knowledge about the region in question, information about the evolving crisis itself, and evidence about what has worked in other situations (Darcy et al. 2013:19). In reality, however, “assessment evidence has been found to play a marginal, or even negligible, role within agencies” in some cases (Darcy et al. 2013:25). A range of external factors, from personal relationships between humanitarian actors to government policy in the recipient country, influence decisions at least as much as evidence does. In
addition, support for innovative solutions to respond to the particularities of a given crisis is often limited: “the tendency is to stick to the traditional interventions, whether or not the evidence supports them” (Darcy et al. 2013:29). As I argued in Chapter Three, the culture around flexibility in a response is shifting in the Cameroonian intervention, but these norms may not yet have diffused throughout the global humanitarian community.

The conclusions of the ACAPS study suggest that processes of humanitarian decision-making are at an important crossroads: ideas about evidence-based policy-making are changing the ways decisions are made, but the reality of decision-making often does not match the ideal. What role should academia, and anthropology in particular, play in the ongoing transformation of the culture of humanitarian decision-making? What are the most useful ways for scholars to add to the base of evidence used to create informed and effective policies?

Applied anthropology: Ethics and inevitability

The first of these questions leads inevitably into the ongoing debate within the discipline of anthropology about the appropriateness of an applied perspective. Is contributing to effective policy-making anthropology’s role? If research is intended mainly to “create knowledge and explain physical and social phenomena,” (Tamale 2011:13) should that purpose be kept separate from activities aimed at making changes to the physical and social phenomena that scholars observe? There are those who would answer this question affirmatively, but others argue that scholarship needs to take a more active role in the world. Anthropology, perhaps more than other disciplines, has a well-
established applied tradition, reaching back to E.E. Evans-Pritchard, one of the fathers of the discipline (Evans-Pritchard 1946). Increasingly, anthropologists are hired as consultants for international aid organizations, from the UNHCR to the World Bank, to use their expertise to problem-solve for these agencies. On one hand, blurring the lines on the continuum from academic to applied anthropology can raise some ethical concerns: How will a scholar’s affiliation with a specific organization affect her access and the quality of her research? How does one handle the ambiguity when informants may also be recipients of aid? How legitimate is the notion of an outsider’s “expertise” on a group? On the other hand, attempts to maintain a strict separation between academia and advocacy raise ethical questions of their own: How long can or should a scholar stand by and document atrocities without intervening?

Many anthropologists make a strong case for an applied perspective within the discipline. As anthropology has, over the past few decades, reexamined its identity and come to terms with some of the problematic aspects of its past relationship to colonial projects, some anthropologists seek to “take responsibility for the potential effects of the knowledge produced about people and their cultures, to contribute to decolonizing the relationship between researcher and research subject...and to engage in a form of anthropology that [is] committed to human liberation” (Speed 2006:67). The growing importance of NGOs in international relations, and the increasing trend of anthropologists working for them, means that the applied perspective in anthropology cannot be ignored (Hackenberg 2000). Certainly, challenges remain for those who would apply anthropology, particularly around granting anthropologists “expert status” in policy-
making processes; anthropologists are actively grappling with these challenges, and the question of how to create an ethically applied anthropology remains (Sillitoe 2007). Many scholars are dedicated to this grappling, though, because of their determination not to “use their data as a pillow” when they return home from the field; they want their research to contribute to something beyond their own careers (Kirksey 2009).

My own experience among humanitarian NGOs in Bertoua suggests that a clear-cut division between scholarly anthropology and application of knowledge is no longer one we can even reasonably claim to make. Even when those working for NGOs or other humanitarian organizations are not anthropologists themselves, they are influenced by scholarly perspectives on their work. As explained in Chapter Three, I encountered informants who echoed the ideas I had studied in academic critiques of humanitarian work. Particularly as the field of humanitarianism becomes more professionalized, those working for these NGOs will have completed studies focused on humanitarianism, and their familiarity with academic perspectives will guide their work in the field. Whether directly intended or not, anthropological knowledge affects policy; it concerns “real outcomes for real people” (Darcy et al. 2013:5). Recognizing this inevitability may help us make the academia-application link more intentional and effective.

The role of positive case studies in evaluation research

Recently, in conversation with a professor from another department, I mentioned that I was an anthropology major with a concentration in Human Rights and Humanitarianism. He responded, “So, you must have spent four years learning why
everything you ever wanted to do with your life is wrong.” Though he was teasing, he made a valid point about anthropology as a discipline, particularly in the realms of human rights and humanitarianism. Anthropologists tend to study topics related to crises; they seek out situations where people are suffering or being taken advantage of. Moreover, when they study efforts to respond to these situations, they tend to be highly critical, deconstructing these efforts and looking at any parts of them that may not be working. This was certainly my experience of the anthropological study of humanitarianism before I departed for Cameroon. Is this the only “right” way to approach humanitarian studies? In scholarship that recognizes its inevitable impacts on policy in the world, I believe, there is a place for studying what is working alongside studying what is going wrong. The combination of these two perspectives can help policy-makers address problems in their approach without feeling the need to deconstruct the entire system.

An anthropological preoccupation with global problems is illustrated in Oliver-Smith’s 1996 article about research on hazards and disasters. He affirms that this has become a significant subfield of study in anthropology, whose proliferation has spurred the emergence of several approaches to studying these topics. Among these approaches are the behavioral and organizational response approach, the social change and development approach, and the political economy approach (Oliver-Smith 1996:305; 314). The multiplicity of anthropological ways of understanding disasters speaks to a certain orientation within the discipline toward situations where everything is going wrong, where injustices are being committed and peoples’ lives turned upside down.
Neil Thin also speaks strongly to the negativity-focused perspective found in most of the social sciences. Studies of human rights, he says, “have always been more about wrongs than rights” (Thin 2012:10). Despite significant progress in recent years toward promoting human rights for all, scholars continue to focus on abuses and transgressions (Thin 2012:10). “Subjective experience, particularly if it is good experience, goes largely unrepresented in human rights reports” (Thin 2012:11). Anthropology, with its research tradition of participant observation and recent trends toward recognizing the value of subjectivity in research, might be uniquely positioned to bring this understanding of positive subjective experience to the study of human rights. However, as Thin declares, anthropology has “for much of its history showed minimal interest in how people actually experience the social and cultural institutions through which they organise their lives” (Thin 2012:9). Where there have been recent movements toward anthropological study of such subjective topics as emotion, as in the work of Wendy James (1997), the focus is still on negative emotions like fear.

There are very compelling reasons for choosing to study situations of disaster and cases where everything seems to be going wrong. For applied anthropologists, an understanding of what is going wrong is crucial to effectively working to set it right. A problem-focused orientation in anthropology may also be about moving the discipline away from a problematic past. In the face of accusations about anthropologists’ roles in perpetuating colonialism or in essentializing the marginalized groups they often studied, a human-rights and problem-solving focus in anthropology is a way to reclaim the
discipline. These are compelling reasons for choosing these topics, and anthropology can bring much-needed micro-level, community perspectives to understandings of disasters.

An overarching argument of my thesis has been, however, that investigating the successful aspects of an international intervention can also yield significant insights. In Cameroon, it is precisely the fact that the refugee response is proceeding smoothly that introduces the possibility for that response to contribute to Cameroon’s development. Beyond the ways in which this perspectives gives us a more well-rounded understanding of how the refugee regime operates today in routinized crises, such an approach can also contribute to the above-discussed processes of evaluation-based policy making.

The contributions of evaluation of successful cases to effective policy making are at the core of Thin’s argument. He contends that an approach focused on the positive can legitimately lead to better policy-making to address problems. How, he asks, can we create effective policies whose ultimate goal is to promote people’s well-being if we have no academic context for understanding well-being and the situations that produce it (Thin 2012:7)? Empirical study of positive outcomes, he argues, can better inform policy-making to promote those outcomes. These ideas align with the conclusions of scholars engaged in studying evaluative practices in the humanitarian field. The ACAPS study, for instance, concluded that an understanding of which intervention models work is missing from the approach of decision makers. “The evidence base proving which humanitarian responses are most effective is extremely lacking. Investments must be made in the consolidation of evidence about what works in response to different kinds of needs in different contexts” (Darcy et al. 2013:33). Though an academic focus on problem-solving
is an important component of transforming humanitarian action, research that focuses on what is working in cases of success also has an important contribution to make. As the humanitarian field continues shifting toward a more evaluation-based approach to decision making, academic tools for evaluating effective programming will become even more crucial to shaping the international humanitarian landscape.

Conclusion

There are undoubtedly some elements of the approach to the refugee response in eastern Cameroon that could have been handled more effectively. The concerns about corruption which came up repeatedly in my interviews are just one example of areas where problems may have arisen. In constructing this thesis, however, I have chosen to focus mainly on the successes of the refugee integration effort in Cameroon, and the implications of that success for Cameroon’s development. This reflects the understanding that, for my informants, the lived reality of their day-to-day work is one of implementing proven strategies to create tangible improvements in people’s lives. It also proceeds from an understanding of anthropology as naturally engaged in the events of the world, and of a best-practices approach to evaluation research as having a positive contribution to make to policy making. The Cameroonian case examined in this thesis is significant not only for what it can tell us about how integration works, or how international humanitarian aid can contribute to the development of host states, but for the questions it prompts us to ask about how we conduct anthropology, both in terms of how we choose to approach our research and of our understanding of how that research affects action in the world.
Chapter Six
Conclusions

I arrived in eastern Cameroon to do my field research at a crucial point in the unfolding of a refugee intervention. The initial phase, that of providing emergency relief such as food and shelter to refugees as they arrived, had concluded. Those organizations, such as MSF, which concern themselves primarily with meeting these urgent needs had already left the region. In most cases, whether in the media or in academic study of refugee crises, this early stage captures the most attention. We are intrigued by this time when thousands of people are on the move, emotions run high, and much—meaning human lives—is at stake. In Cameroon, where even this emergency stage received only minimal media coverage, very little attention has been given to what happens next, when the influx of refugees ceases, people are settled, and the imminent danger of death abates. My field research, examining NGOs’ activities during this second stage, revealed a seemingly unremarkable process of professional humanitarian workers going about their work, bringing a measure of relief to communities in need of assistance.

My argument throughout this thesis, however, has been that the straightforward nature of refugee relief efforts in eastern Cameroon is precisely what makes it remarkable. My informants, particularly those who had worked in humanitarian interventions in other countries, recognized Cameroon as a uniquely good place to work. Here, in the absence of a plethora of complicating factors, they could simply get their jobs done. In Cameroon, the refugee intervention seems to be working more or less as it

52 A resurgence of violence in the CAR in early 2013, and subsequent resurgence of refugees fleeing into eastern Cameroon, has undoubtedly changed the scenario described here. For some initial information and thoughts on this most recent influx, see Timchia (2013) and Schlein (2013).
was designed to, successfully implementing humanitarian principles and best practices in a context of local integration. The Cameroonian case is important for its illustration of humanitarian action in such a “routinized” response.

Two unusual factors initially drew my interest to refugees in Cameroon. The first was the way refugees are directly integrated into existing Cameroonian communities, without use of refugee camps. This factor proved key to understanding the success of the relief effort. Here, as well, the issue of temporality is important. While refugee camps might be useful in the initial stages of an influx--by concentrating refugees in one place, they simplify the distribution of aid--integration holds many benefits in a longer-term situation. Settling refugees into communities allows them to regain a sense of “normalcy,” integrating into local patterns of social and economic life rather than continuously feeling suspended between one place and another.

It also broadens the scope of who can assist the refugees and their host communities. In eastern Cameroon, because refugees are integrated into local communities, they receive aid not only from refugee-focused NGOs such as PU-AMI but also from development organizations such as Plan Cameroon, which would assist those communities regardless of the refugees’ presence. This approach is beneficial not only to refugees but to local Cameroonian and to the state as a whole. Integrating refugees allows them to contribute economically to their villages; focusing humanitarian relief resources on Cameroonian communities contributes to ongoing development efforts. Thus, use of local integration as a solution to the refugee influx in eastern Cameroon adds
not only to the success of the refugee response, but to the “side effects” of the response on Cameroon’s process of state-building.

The second unusual factor that drew me to Cameroon is the very lack of attention focused on the refugee response. Given the prominence to which refugees have risen as a topic for anthropological research, I had expected that, in spite of its relatively small scale, the refugee situation in Cameroon would have been studied by someone. Given the rather low level of international political interest focused on either the CAR or on Cameroon, however, and given the lack of major blunders in the organizational response to the refugee influx, perhaps it is not surprising that refugees in Cameroon have escaped notice. It could appear, on the surface, as if nothing particularly interesting is happening: refugees arrive, they are assisted by the UNHCR and its partner organizations, and they settle into host communities. The tacit impacts on Cameroon’s national development, however, and the questions this raises about why and how Cameroon chooses to accommodate these refugees, certainly add interest not immediately obvious on the surface. This is one argument for studying cases of success in the realm of humanitarian interventions: sometimes more is happening than meets the eye.

Another argument, suggested by the discussion of evaluation practices and applied anthropology in Chapter Five, is that understanding what works in a given situation helps us formulate better policy to address other situations. Our understanding of how to respond to refugee emergencies is incomplete if we only study cases of failure. It is certainly important to understand what went wrong to avoid such mistakes in the future. However, we also need to understand proactive ways to foster success.
I have thus, in this thesis, presented an argument for the importance of studying a seemingly marginal refugee situation and the international response to that situation. I have described the approach taken by the UNHCR and its partner organizations in responding to the refugee influx from the CAR, and have explored some of the implications of that response for Cameroon’s development as a state. Ultimately, I argue, the benefits accruing to Cameroon from the local integration of refugees helps reinforce Cameroon’s position as a sovereign state within the “national order of things.” My analysis of the situation, however, is limited by constraints of time and access. Future scholars, building on the introduction I present here, could deepen the understanding of what is going right in Cameroon.

One important issue for further investigation is that of the implementation of the 2005 refugee law: as the Cameroonian government begins taking responsibility for refugee status determinations, what are the effects on the situation of refugees on the ground? Another important development to monitor will be what happens when the situation in the CAR stabilizes enough that it is deemed safe for people to return. Refugees from Chad, longtime residents of northern Cameroon, were beginning the repatriation process at the time of my field research. Will Central African refugees, who have settled into and become part of their host communities, eventually be urged to leave those communities and return “home?” What effects would such a repatriation effort have on the East as a region?

A final interesting process to watch will be the withdrawal of humanitarian organizations from the East. Organizations such as PU-AMI understand their role to be temporary--they arrive in response to an emergency, and leave when the emergency is
over. Though, as I have described, PU-AMI is making efforts to assure continuity, it is likely that there will be something of a gap left behind when the organization departs. In addition, the definitive declaration of the end of an emergency is not an easy one to make, as evidenced by PU-AMI’s continued presence in eastern Cameroon after the departure of other organizations such as MSF. The process of decision-making on PU-AMI’s part about when it is time to leave Cameroon will be interesting to follow for those interested in the separation and confluence of humanitarianism and development.
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